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THE DRYADS

AND OTHER TALES

FOR THE YOUNG IN HEART OF ANY AGE

THE DRYADS

AND OTHER TALES

For the Young in Heart of any Age

BY

FRANK WHITE

Author and Composer of, among other frivolities, Literary, Musical and otherwise, "Jangle-Jingles" Lyrics; "The Drowsy Dustman" Fairy Tale and Orchestral Suite of incidental Music; and other Compositions recorded by the Columbia Graphophone Company Limited

ILLUSTRATIONS

BY

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Published for FRANK WHITE

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Oh Youth unspoiled and Fancy-free. . . .
Come let us roam in Arcadie. . . .
Though would-be-wise and dullard blind decry the gems
that we shall find,
Let us go seek the treasure rare
—The Cobweb-Castle in the Air,
Of a Fool in his Folly Oh! Folly, folly, Oh!

(From the Author's "Jangle-Jingles" Series I)

PREFACE

I FEEL as I suppose a youngster feels when he launches from the shore of the Round Pond his trim little craft with canvas set, hoping it may reach port on the opposite bank, and not short-circuit and come to land again three feet away. Or be run down by a duck.

For an unbiassed critic, in all kindliness, warned me that though Grimm and Andersen still had a vogue in the nursery, fairy tales were nowadays coldly looked upon by young people of older growth, in whose more mature judgment stories of matter-of-fact subjects within the range of their experience had preference.

Well, I wonder! For even in my own limited circle, for which this book was originally alone intended, there are still to be found juveniles of the old-fashioned variety, who, having long since discarded crawlers, do not turn up their noses at fairy lore.

Then; mustn't there be others?

Hence for the nonce casting off dry-as-dust professional shackles, and optimistic as the youthful skipper above mentioned, I launch this Ship of Fantasy—its more valuable freight being the illustrations by an Artist whose willing and painstaking collaboration I gratefully acknowledge—hoping she may be fortunate enough to enjoy favouring winds and a fair passage, and thus gain the Hearts of those young 'uns I know; have known; and of those I never shall know.

If she founders in the tuppenny box at the second-hand booksellers' my Mentor alluded to will be able to say, "I told you so!" But if she wins through to the havens desired, it

will be for me to jab my finger into his ribs, hard; gurgling gleefully, "Ha! ha!"

The first of my three old tales re-told—all written when leisure permitted—is of serious import, with an ending some readers may deem unhappy, others not. So lest the former view induces depression, the other two are evolved in lighter, not to say frivolous, vein; in the hope of suiting a variety of tastes. And ages.

I would add that all persons, firms and corporations mentioned in the book are purely imaginary.

230 *Great Portland Street, W.*1.

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THE DRYADS

Original Version of The Sleeping Beauty

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NOTE: Part I, consisting of a transcript of the ancient manuscripts, the discovery of which is related in Part II, is advisedly so placed that all events described may run in order of date.

INTRODUCTION

THIS tale of a Sleeping Beauty will make no appeal to readers whether seven, seventeen, or seventy years of age, who disdain faerie lore and mysticism. So with that warning, and also directing attention to the conclusion of this exordium, I can go ahead with a clear conscience; for if anyone now peruses what follows, it will be from choice!

Which will please me very much.

My story opens at a time when roads were few and often little more than rough tracks; long before England's Green and Pleasant Land got cluttered up with railroads, telegraph and telephone poles, and motors, and scarred by unlovely radio-masts and equally disfiguring grid-pylons—horrible word for horrible excrescences!—before the stately white clouds on high became a mere background for booming aeroplanes; before Satan with sardonic grin spread the poisonous blight of petrol throughout the habitable globe; and in other words before the Men of Science, setting up as a false god crass materialism, devoted time and misdirected thought how more effectively to kick old Mother Nature in the face, and dethrone ancient comforting beliefs.

In those unhurried days, fairies, joyous in care-free existence were believed to haunt each forest, spinney, hill and stream. There were Naiads of the Rivers, Oreads of the Mountains, Dryads of the Woods. Besides these, there were the Sea-nymphs; those in the West Country delighting to sport amid the laughing wavelets, or among the rocks and caverns along the shores of the Channels, one of which stretched out to France, and the other wound up to where silver Severn came to meet the wider reach of water laving the shores of Exmoor

and southern Wales. To whatever tribe they belonged they were all strictly forbidden, except in dreams, to show themselves to or speak with grown-up mortals—if they did, tragedy followed as the ensuing narrative will show. Only children of tender years and innocence were privileged to see and converse with those happy denizens of the countryside.

Then there were Brownies, Gnomes, Will-o'-the wisps, and Pixies ; the last-named mischievous and prone out of impishness but not really intending to do any great harm, to vex and tease humans ; for instance by leading them astray on the Moors, especially at nightfall, maliciously amused to see unfortunate wayfarers floundering through boggy and treacherous places instead of finding firm ground. As for the Nymphs, many a one starting to dance in the fairy rings often found to her tribulation that the pixies had planted stinging-nettles or scattered sharp pebbles overnight, so that she got badly stung through her one-piece frock or hobbled for days afterwards.

Lastly there were the horrible Vampires and their withered handmaids, the ungodly Witches, all dead to kindly feeling, and whose appearance was as forbidding as their dispositions were evil. The pity of it was that every witch had once been a lovable fairy who, falling from grace, had been made to pay dreadful penalty. Hideous to look upon, one of the pictures shows you how repellent they were to the eye.

Their terrible masters, the vampires, partly resembling men and partly gigantic bats, were supposed to live on human blood, and to be the souls of mortals who had perpetrated appalling earth-crimes, and whom the Devil allowed to come back into the world to commit more. Men and women spoke of them with bated breath, fearful of incurring the hostility and becoming the hopeless and despairing prey of these dreadful instigators of crime and of every cruel and relentless thought and action.

Witches were said to fly through the air on broomsticks, and the better to carry out their evil schemes, were permitted

and encouraged by Satan, their supreme ruler, to assume, when they desired, the faces and forms of beautiful women in the same way as the vampires appeared in guise of handsome men.

United in a horrid partnership these fiendish creatures not only persecuted mortals but also venomously pursued the nymphs, their chief aim and effort being to incite a fairy to commit some breach of her own laws of sufficient gravity to incur the consequences described later on. But there were limits to the activities of these black-hearted miscreants, for curious as it may seem, there was for reasons too long to go into here, a friendly pact (dating and loyally observed from time immemorial and based equally on mutual advantage and hatred of warlocks of all kinds) between the fairies on the one hand, and on the other Sulphurin the Emperor of the Dragons. This powerful monarch, whose second-in-command was Rhinoceron the Griffin, held sway over monsters breathing blue fire, and possessing other outstanding characteristics in the shape of formidable claws and teeth. They were also winged, so that besides speeding along the ground they could rise above it. Vampires and witches, whom Sulphurin held in abhorrence, gave them a wide berth, knowing that if the Fairy Queen chose, she could and would call for assistance upon her faithful allies, who would thereupon materialize with disconcerting suddenness, and in the ensuing ruction, unpleasant things attended by considerable discomfort were bound to happen to the powers of evil.

By the way, if you will look at the back of a £1 note you will observe a sketch of a dragon having a rough time with St. George who has apparently taken a dislike to him; and as for a griffin, well, if you live in Town and will walk eastward along the Strand, you will see one done in bronze on a pedestal in the middle of the road almost opposite the Law Courts, marking the boundary of the City of London.

Returning to the fairy folk; those in Wessex owned allegiance to Queen Hyacinth, whose favourite territory was

the lovely county of Devon—the scene of this story—where even to this day are to be found peaceful valleys and delightful dells, while deep, curly lanes nestle amid high hedges scented with honeysuckle and wild rose, or boldly thread the gaunt heather-clad moors surmounted by the quiet grey age-old Tors which, looking upward, seem as if reminding us that if they are everlastingly immutable, yet Man is not. And point the way to Heaven.

Parts of it were, and still are, wild and uncultivated, but at the time I speak of there were miles and miles of sunlit meadows wherein herds of mild-eyed cattle stood knee-deep in lush grasslands enriched by gentle rain and fanned by soft winds. Small wonder that of the whole realm the West Countrie was most beloved of the elfin clan, and those whose lot it was to dwell among its sheltered coombes held themselves—and rightly so—as favoured far above their kindred in other parts, in being privileged to have their being in that Garden of God.

Queen Hyacinth, proud of her subjects as they were of her, held her Court beneath the very shadow of Yes Tor, 'twixt waters of Exe, Dart, and Torridge; there dispensing firmly but kindly the faerie laws; meting out reward here—which delighted her;—and punishment there—which it hurt her to impose. Even the not easily manageable pixies held a warm corner in her heart. And, though insistent on full and unquestioning observance of her enactments, nevertheless she was just, and treated all her subjects with the strictest impartiality. Hence her nymphs, the gnomes, and the little moor-men, all looked up to her, holding her in the greatest respect and rendering her loyal obedience.

Now I've finished this long preamble, and hope I haven't wearied you.

Only one word more.

To show you how even educated persons—and except for churchmen there were very few—wrote and spelled five

centuries ago, a page has been carefully reproduced for you from the original parchment manuscripts discovered and laboriously deciphered by Major Pomary. With that exception I have modernized and punctuated the phrasing of the rest as much as I could without detracting from old-world diction ; otherwise you would have been justified in saying, " Oh, I can't make this out ! " And chucked the whole thing on one side straight away !

Of course, as I hinted at the beginning of these observations, if any of my readers are too matter-of-fact and high-in-the-brow to believe that fairies ever existed, they won't read this book at all.

To them I say, " All right, then ! Don't ! "

PART I

A.D. 1435-1475

THE DRYADS

CHAPTER I

The Writings of Sieur Avril de Pommereine

VERILY in gay and lightsome spirit I, Avril de Pommereine, Knight, Lord of the Manors of Exton, Idepath, Gappford and Lydwell, and many others, dwelling in my Keep of Pommereine; erstwhile Knight Banneret of a troop of horse under mine own Standard in the war fought by Our Sovereign Lord Henry against the King of the Franks, do set myself to indite this history for the reading, if God in His good time so willeth to bless us therewith, of the issue to be born to me and my dearly-beloved wife Sylphiane, sweet Suzerain of my very heart and soul.

Imprimis would I have it understood that I have now been these ten months to her united by the worthy Priest, the Reverend Father Godwyn to wit, and by reason of the strangeness of our coming together do I desire to set down how it so befell.

It so happens that I am this day settled on my Patrimony after much turbulent warfare across the great Sea, striving with those evil men who of wicked intent were like to drive our armies out of the fair land the which by right of conquest heretofore was heritage of England. And glad am I that I have not forgot the instruction imparted to me in early youth by the Very Venerable Prior of Buckfast, and other God-fearing Clerics who there served under him. For he it was that had learned me to read Holy Writ and Lives of the Saints of old; and also to employ myself in the art and mystery of writ symbols, though laboriously and with a halting pen—

accomplishments denied for lack of opportunity to many of birth and breeding equal to mine own.

Right gladsomely then do I attack my self-imposed task; my gracious and loving lady by my side to prompt me when otherwise would I peradventure fail, through treachery of memory, in recalling in ordered fashion the marvellous happenings whereof the upshot was that it pleased God that we be made one by Holy Church.

After the burning of the Maid of Orleans, cruel men of her country and mine consenting thereto, and it being plainly seen that my compatriots were constrained to abandon first one and then other cities of the French King; I, attended by my faithful henchman, aye I and brother-in-arms, Kenelm, now Seneschal of my Castle of Pommereine in right of his loyal service and the wounds he hath suffered (for oft hath he at peril of his life valiantly interposed 'twixt me and violent death), returned to these shores, we both being spent by grievous hurts and privations endured in the service of our King. And after we had disembarked at Sutton[1] was a Truce proclaimed between the contending armies. So now being of an age when the blood in our veins runneth less hotly than of yore, and moreover we twain having taken unto ourselves wives, it be not our purpose other than to spend the rest of our days in the peaceful surroundings and gentle avocations of my vast estate.

Hence have I busied myself these last few years, item, with the control and management of my demesne; item, with the care of those dependent upon me for sustenance; item, with sport of hawk and hound, and lastly with quiet study of the ancient writings in my Muniment Room for increase of my store of knowledge of men and happenings of days past and gone.

And so do I commence this narration.

Now it befell that on a certain evening in May of the year

[1] Now Plymouth.—AUTHOR.

of Our Lord one thousand four hundred and thirty-five, at about the hour of twilight, was I mounted astride my steed (being the same charger that had carried me in many a bloody combat) and with hawk on wrist, wending my way hearthwards after but a poor day's sport.

Suddenly meseemed in the dusk of falling night to hear a hubbub and shrill cackle of laughter, whereon peering betwixt the thicknesses of the tree-boles and foliage thereof, I beheld a beauteous maid in much distress, she crying out in affright and sore travail as if assailed by foes to me invisible.

Wherefore quickly I left the saddle and leapt to the ground, and taking with me my sole weapons, videlicet, my dagger and knife for flaying of the deer, I plunged into the undergrowth, forcing my way therein to her succour. And as I approached her meseemed to hear frightened twitterings and the sound of little feet running away from me in terror.

Doffing my cap, spake I gently to the weeping maiden, who was indeed fair to look upon, being rich of countenance and of comely shape, albeit of small stature. Silken was the curly hair about her little head, and her eyes were like unto still clear pools on Dartymore. All of which I saw not on the instant, but little by little, for I am not of the disposition as some men are, to take in maidenly charms at one glance. Said I:—

"Have courage, Damsel, no harm shall befall thee; am I not here to protect?"

She, raising her bowed head, looked up at me (for I be taller than most men) regarding me gravely yet with something of fearfulness, but observing that I gazed upon her benevolently and with respect, she stood erect and murmured words of thankfulness; and her voice was such that then, and ever thereafter, it were like unto silver bells echoing from Heaven. And then did she look about her questingly, darting glances here and there in the fern and brake about us.

"What seekest thou?"

"My wings," answered she. "They took them away."

"Art then an Angel?" said I, about to kneel, and crossing myself.

"Nay, Sir Knight, no Angel am I, for they have their habitation in the skies, whereas mine is of the earth."

"Wherefore then hast need of wings?"

She again bent a searching gaze around, and whispered low, "I am of the Dryads of Færie Land. My wings confer invisibility upon me till I doff them and become of flesh and blood even as thou. Had I but kept them on my shoulders this misfortune had not befallen me; for it is not good that I be seen of mankind, save only of little children."

"Thy misfortune, as thou call'st it," quoth I, "is indeed my gain; for there must be few indeed of my years who have beheld one of thy kin in mortal guise. I hold myself thereby richly privileged. What art called?"

"I be yclept 'Sylphiane,'" replied she, still peeping here and there among the brackens.

"A right sweet name in very sooth," said I. "And in fair exchange, I will impart mine own name and station."

"No need," quoth she, "I and my sisters know thee well, as being a gallant knight and well affected to my kindred. Thou art the Sieur de Pommereine."

"A mouthful too large for thy lips; 'twere briefer to call me 'Avril,'" said I.

"Avril," she repeated, and for the first time smiled; and again, lingering on the word, "Avril."

"In sooth," said I, "never knew I till now that my appellation were so pleasing; though thine is by far the more melodious. But tell me, Sylphiane, how cometh it that thou art in such piteous case as thou appearest to think?"

Then did she recount to me how that she was one of three sisters; Violas, Floreal, and she herself. That she was the most favoured of all by Hyacinth her Queen, and stood ever at her right hand, greatly loving and out of thousands of other Elves being beloved by her as her Chief Sprite and

closest personal attendant. Also how that day had been spent in diversion and happy frolic in the woods, until, tired by the heat of the Sun, she, Sylphiane, had withdrawn herself from her companions for a short space. That she for greater ease in reclining had heedlessly removed her wings, for fear of crushing them. And then had lain down; falling fast asleep in the shade of an Oak tree. Her companions either had not observed her absence, or else when faring back to their own Dells at dusk, had likely supposed she had gone on before, and had departed leaving her there all alone. Came a band of Moor-pixies full, as ever their wont, of mischief, who seeing her, also her wings apart, softly drew near and stealthily removed and concealed them. Which done, they let shrill screams which aroused her in dismay; whereupon they danced around her, mouthing, then pinched her, and pricked her with thorns. Also did they put wasps adown her neck, the which did not sting her, but both she and the winged things suffered discomfort. Lastly when she sought to break through them, they encircled her and hindered her escape, continuing their naughty pranks and persecution until my advent put them to hurried flight.

During this recital in tone of gentle melancholy my heart was strangely stirred, and I, who had hitherto held women of little account, was hard put to it not to comfort her and to kiss her on her sweet brow and lips. Anon all the time was her glance roving about the bushes and anon returning to eye me sidelong.

"Be of good cheer, Lady," said I, "we will together search for what thou lackest; fear not, we shall immediately discover them."

Wherein did I speak truly, for lo! soon did I descry her wings shimmering with a goodly sheen amid the bracken-fern; but alas! they being so delicately fashioned and brittle, had with mishandling become grievously crumpled and torn; thus rendered impossible of use.

"Woe is me," cried she plaintively in dire distress; "What indeed shall I now do? I cannot fare so many miles afoot through the darkening night."

"Take comfort," quoth I, "for my Palfrey waiteth hard by, and thou shalt ride with me whithersoever thou desirest. Come with me, Sylphiane, and mount."

Then being come to where my Charger stood patiently, I swung myself into the saddle, and she placing her dainty foot in the stirrup I held out for her, I took her soft hand in mine, lifting her; and with a spring, she was up behind me; and no little to my satisfaction, with her body pressed to mine, and her arms about me for security. But never, e'en among the perils of the Field, did I wish so ardently as then, that I had eyes in the back of my head, to delight them with her comeliness.

Whiles that we were going, I heard her trying over in a low voice—pleasing me exceedingly—my name "Avril"; and then again "Avril"; as if to remember it. Whereat in imitation of her I countered with "Sylphiane" as if with like intent; thereupon did she give a musical laugh, emboldening me to let loose my Kestrel—the which impeded me—and my hand thus freed, to place it on hers. She resisting not, my spirit trilled within me like unto a lark in upward flight.

Eftsoons I heard her murmur "Here set me down, Avr—Sir Knight; for we are nigh to my people, and it is not good that we be seen thus in company."

"And wherefore?" asked I, in some concern.

"Because it be forbid to us to foregather with Mortals when they have seen more than ten summers at most; save only when they be sleeping. We may not have speech with them on pain of punishment. 'Tis the strictest law of our Faerie Kingdom. Had I but had on my wings, thou hadst not seen me this eve."

"Nay; what punishment could anyone be so ruthless as to mete out to one so lov . . . lorn as thou?"

"Moor-Pixies . . . who seeing her, also her wings apart . . . concealed them."

The Dryad.

(See p. 15)

"The penalty of disobedience," said she with a shudder, "speak not of it for it is i' faith a terrible one."

"But verily," quoth I as I dismounted, and lifted her down, "I was hopeful that I should meet thee again in time to come."

"Perchance, Sir Knight," said she, "I might also have similar desire. But thou must not behold me again, nor must I have any further speech with thee." Then looking down, and blushing rosily, she murmured, "When art like again to be hereabout?"

"Ah ha! then thou dost wish that we meet another time?" cried I in great joy, my heart aglow with happiness.

"Truly, I fain would do so," replied she without mincing, "if 'twere but possible; but there would be grave peril to thee and me."

"Peril?" laughed I with scorn; "peril and I are no strangers this long while back. If my arm hath not lost its strength, what danger to thee that I cannot avert?"

"Thou understandest not," she answered sadly, "the Queen would banish me, aye, and worse to follow."

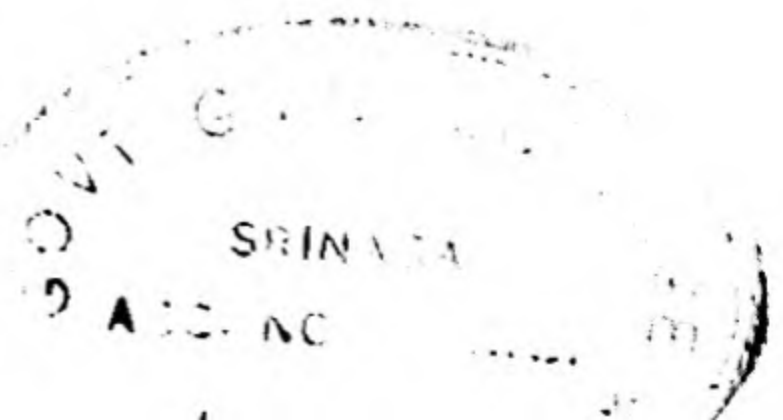
"Then let me plead with her," I besought urgently.

"Oh no! oh no! indeed," breathed she in affright.

Then did I swear unto myself that if I saw her not again, life would be but a poor thing; and overbold, speaking straight from my heart, quoth I,

"Hark ye, Sylphiane, an thou sayest thou wilt gladden my sight no more, I will here and now seek out thy Queen and solicit leave that we speak with each other."

Then, in part thereto persuaded by me, and part in fear lest I carry out my intention; also saying "Nay" many times yet meaning "Yea" to my behest; she at length with misgiving but with more desire—bless her sweet soul therefor!—trembling and with many a glance round, gave her murmured promise for a further Tryst, and that day sennight was appointed. So, with many a backward look and



wave of the hand, we parted for the nonce, she to return to her companions; and I, in seventh Heaven of rapture, pricking back to Pommereine, where I lay through the night in a mood of ecstasy, recalling her every look and word.

And she? She hath since avowed to me she did likewise as she lay on her couch of petal-blossom, full of joyful anticipation and counting, as did also I, the hours till we should once more open our minds and hearts the one to the other.

Now, I, being but ill-versed in the art of wooing a Maid, did take counsel of my Seneschal, who as have I already said, had wooed and won. For I am not above learning from others how to tread unknown paths. Yet, on hearing from him how he had gone about it, meseemed he had done so in somewhat bumpkin and rough-shod fashion; nay, even savouring of disrespect. And whenas my thoughts turned on Sylphiane, I could not bring myself to ape him.

Yet the matter of my doubt happily resolved itself, for when she and I again foregathered; on the instant that our eyes met—neither of us of previous intention so to do—our arms entwined the one about the other, and her fragrant lips met and stayed long on mine. Then, my Soul aglow, did I stand her off from me, gravely gazing on her, and she likewise on me, till I knelt at her feet and humbly kissed her hand. And so did we plight our troth.

Many were the meetings thereafter in the Greenwood, we for fear of detection keeping our trysts in divers places wide apart; for ever was my Lady timorous, anon urging me to see her no more, and anon murmuring that she could not exist without me; her avowed love being my chiefest ally in this happy adventure, overbearing her judgment and making it subservient to her affection.

Natheless, despite all our caution, discovery at length did lay us by the heels.

For on a fateful night, silver Luna riding high in the

Heavens betrayed us, leading my elfin sweetheart into terrible danger.

'Twas as she clung to me as we were about to part, that we heard a howl of eldritch laughter hard by, and my Beloved stood as if turned into stone; then falling against me crying "A Witch! a Witch!" swooned away, the while I essayed to pierce the shadows with searching eye. And then saw I a foul Hag grimacing at us; mumbling and smacking her withered lips.

"So, Sir Knight," she croaked, "this is the aim of thy nightly excursions. This the pretty bird thou would'st snare. The lofty high-souled Sylphiane, so scornful of me and mine, hast thou made thy Quarry. 'Tis well! Much thanks to thee. Soon shall she have her pride humbled and laid low in the dust, being forced into our band. Yea! by the Laws of Faeriedom. Her haughty Queen shall straightway know what I have to tell her, and do justice, awarding this dainty culprit to us and our Cozens the Vampires to do with as we will."

So saying, she raised a screech; and with sinking heart did I behold three others of her kind approaching from divers points. She who had spoken despatched one directing her to find the Queen and bring her hither. I was of a mind to slit their throats with my dagger, but they, doubtless scenting my mood, swung themselves into the high boughs, and I durst not follow one, lest other of them descend and work harm to my Love, prone at my feet. Therefore did I kneel by her with endearing and heartening words on my lips.

And whiles that I did this, I could hear rustlings and whisperings in the foliage about; and could sense, though I could not see them, that there were myriads of Beings gathering together; the three Hags, clucking and grinning in horrid fashion, alone being visible.

Then did the absent one return screaming, "The Queen cometh! The Queen cometh! To hear and judge and cast her haughty Sylphiane from her erstwhile high estate." And as

she spoke I heard a flapping of wings and lo! a Vampire hovered above, watching.

Whereat my blood ran cold and I stood up, with hand on dagger-hilt to do I knew not what, save to avert ill to her whom I loved better than Life itself.

As I drew it from its sheath, an imperious but silv'ry voice like unto that of Sylphiane, broke upon my ear, demanding, "To what end am I besought to come hither?"

And the Hag answered, "Lo! oh Queen, behold thine handmaid, thy favourite, Sylphiane! Her have I and my cronies seen, visible to sight—having doffed her wings—in the arms of this Knight whom thou and we know to be Avril of Pommereine. Hath she committed a Faerie crime or no? Answer! oh just and upright Queen."

And there was a great stillness, broken by wailing of soft little voices.

Then she who was addressed gave forth a shuddering sigh, and then slowly and in a trembling voice, as tho' coming from a breaking heart:

"Oh, Sylphiane, Sylphiane, whom I loved with an exceeding love, that it should be thee to do this thing."

And again the pitiful tremulous wailing, but still could I not descry aught but the evil black Shapes which again importuned in shrill accents:

"Is it not writ, oh Queen, that an Elf making herself known, save in dreams, to a Mortal of mature years, shall pay penalty therefor?"

Again was there silence for a space, and again the Queen, "Oh, Sylphiane, thou of all of us."

Then a pause; and the Witch's mocking cackle broke thereon:

"Be there then one Law for Sylphiane, and otherwise for thine other Sprites? Come, let us make an end; see thou to Judgment and Sentence!"

The Queen answered in a low voice:

"There be but one Law and all be equal before the Law."

"And what is the penalty, oh upright Queen. Be it not banishment from thy Court?"

"Yea," replied the Queen, "'tis indeed banishment from my Realm."

"Then, furthermore," went on the Hag viciously, "is there not somewhat else?"

"Thou hast said."

"Proclaim then, great Queen, what shall befall this dainty criminal; she who affecting loyalty, yet trampleth on the Law by thee enacted and administered—oft by her as thy spokeswoman."

"The further penalty," replied the Queen's voice quivering, "is . . ." and stopped.

"The punishment is . . .?" said the Witch prompting.

"The further penalty is Death . . . or to become one with the Vampires and thy unholy kindred."

Thereupon the Witches in triumph laughed loudly, but my Love, by then standing with my arm round her, cast herself down in trembling affright, crying,

"Mercy, oh mercy, beloved Mistress!"

Once more that soul-searing silence, and then,

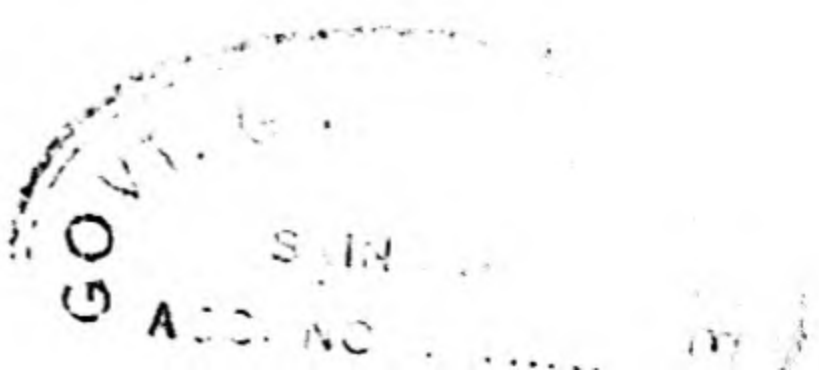
"Nay, though it wring my very soul, Justice must be done. No leniency may I dispense; only the Law whereof I am the fount."

"The Sentence! the Sentence!" howled the Hags and the waiting Vampire. "We are of a mind to be merciful. We seek not her death; but no more than that she be delivered to us to become as we are."

Thereat I could keep silence no longer, but spoke, and with raised voice quoth I:

"I may not behold thee with mine eyes, Lady, but mine ears tell me thou art addressed as Queen. Art thou in very truth the Queen Hyacinth?"

"I am indeed she," was the response.



"Then give me leave to speak," said I earnestly. "On me the blame; also on thine own following, the initial cause of this matter, for had it not been that thy Pixies on an occasion had wickedly stolen Sylphiane's wings whiles she slept, mine eyes had not beheld her. Seeing her, I loved her. Loving her, I constrained her, to my exceeding happiness, to meet me again and again. Thou hast heard tell who I am?"

"I know thee to be the Sieur de Pommereine," replied the voice.

"And hast thou heard aught but of good repute of me?"

"Thou art well known to be a gallant and honourable gentleman. But 'tis beside the matter; I have no jurisdiction over thee. Natheless over my subjects I possess all Power of Reward and Punishment. Laws are Laws and are not made for the breaking. Sylphiane hath offended, therefore must she be cast forth from the companionship of her kind; aye! and out of my heart also." Then her voice died away; and she saith in a low tone, "Remaineth only to decide whether she die the death or liveth on as a foul Witch."

"Oh Queen," quoth I, my spirit growing hot within me, "an thou maintain this inflexibility of purpose; know also that I also can be unbending. Hark ye! an a hair of her dear head be hurt, or these loathsome Harridans or their Satanic Kin be let claim her to work their wicked will on her, I swear, oh Queen, that every tree and bush that now harboureth thee and thine will I raze to the ground or burn with consuming fire. Ev'ry stream, ev'ry rill, ev'ry pool, on my estates shall be befouled so that no longer thou and thine Elves may shelter within my wide demesnes."

"Tush," said the Queen, "thou speakest as a fool in his folly, and in heat without due consideration either for those which serve thee or me. Though I loved her who standeth by thee, my love may not blind me to the enormity of her offence. Neither do thy threats move me. I may not temper justice with mercy even for her sake."

"Justice, forsooth!" cried I; "Heaven preserve me from such Justice! She hath done naught amiss only . . ."

"She hath broken the two chief Statutes of my Kingdom; she hath spoken with thee; also hath she foregathered in human shape with thee, the consequence whereof she well knew."

While this was going forward, the Witches had menacingly been drawing nearer and nearer to us, the which I had not failed to observe. Flinging therefore my Horseman's cloak over my shoulder, and holding forth my dagger by the point thereof so that the silvered cross-hilt gleamed in the moonlight, I cried in a loud voice,

"In the Name of God and His Angels, avaunt, Devil-women! Approach no nigher!" and on the instant did they shrink back abashed, muttering under their breath. And the great black Vampire Bat spread his sombre wings and mounting higher disappeared far away behind the tree-tops.

Then did the Lord quicken my understanding, and still bearing the Sacred symbol aloft, once more did I address the unseen Queen.

"Oh Queen, bethink thee; an thou consign my dear one to Death or Hell, thou shalt thyself offend against God omnipotent, and also against me who hath done thee no hurt. And eke would I put to thee this interrogation; art above thine own Laws?"

"Have I not said of a certainty they bind all—myself down to the humblest Pixie?"

"Then, oh Queen, let us suppose it should be thou in thine own person that erred, should'st thou do justice on thyself?"

"Of a truth, yea; nor should I waver."

"Then," quoth I with a laugh, "submit thyself also to thy Law for thou hast thyself but now broke it."

"How sayest thou?" said the voice in high amaze.

"How say I? Am I not plainly no longer of years of

childhood? and hast thou not thyself foregathered and had speech with me as forbid by thy Enactments? Thou art thyself guilty of a Faerie crime."

Thereon the voice was silent, but methought I heard agitated whisperings among the trees; and the Hags, at a loss, looked the one at the others. And snarled very fiercely at me. Whereat I threw back my head and laughed in their wicked faces, the more to enrage them. For I was hopeful they would attack me in their spleen and then would I know how to deal with them.

Spake the Queen again, and meseemed I could discern something of relief in her tone:

"Art glib, Sieur Avril; but not glib enow. Thou hast forgot the axiom 'the Queen can do no wrong'. Natheless as thou hast reminded me, I am bound to observance of the Law. I will consider thy plea, and take counsel. Withdraw, I command thee, a little space."

Lifting up my love, her tender frame convulsed with bitter sobbing, I stepped back a few paces and waited. And many moments passed until, hearing my name called, I went forward again.

"Sir Avril; it hath been decided in this instance that beyond sentence of banishment on Sylphiane, 'twere better I pass no further Judgment, but that her own kindred shall elect whether she forfeit life, or become a Witch. Therefore wracked with a great sorrow, do I perform my part. . . . Sylphiane . . . henceforth art thou not of us. . . . Thy Faerie immortality do I wrest from thee. Here and now do I exile thee for ever . . . in token whereof do I break thy wings in twain. Henceforth, victim of Mortal pain and sorrow shalt thou be."

At the close of this mournful speech, slowly and haltingly spoken, the Hell-hags burst into screams of laughter of horrid sort, crying in elation, "She be ours! She be ours! Dainty prey, forsooth!"

"Peace, Beldams! till I have done," sternly saith the Queen. "Furthermore, Sylphiane, thou may'st not retain any shred of Faerie raiment, but I would not have thee shamed before these nor him who standeth by thee. Doff thy cloak, Sir Avril, and enwrap her therein; then shall her erstwhile kindred make election of their dreadful choice of Doom."

This did I, and I beheld gossamer garments fall about the feet of my love and wither away. Then of a certainty prompted from Above: "By thy leave, Oh Queen, not so fast. Is not Sylphiane now become Mortal and of my race?"

"Have I not so said?" answered the voice.

"Then," cried I, "of what avail prate of penalties, whereof one only of two may be imposed? If she be mortal the hour of her death lieth in the hands of God; and as for the delivery of her unto the bestial Devil-kin, why! here and now do I set upon her the Sign of the Cross." And so saying I pressed the hilt of my dagger on my love's pure brow crying, "In the Name of the Holy Trinity thus do I render harmless those who would work her scathe."

A screech of unbridled anger arose from the baffled Hags, and arms raised and clawing at the air and baring their toothless gums, they made to run at us; but again I raised my weapon aloft, cross-hilt upwards, but ready to reverse it and plunge it into their foul bodies; whereupon mopping and mowing and with blasphemous cursings, again they paused, foiled of their prey.

Low murmurs of admiration arose from the Unseen Ones, followed by a burst of joyous chattering, and the Queen's voice commanded silence. Then she spoke, and meseemed with less of grief:

"In sooth do I commend thy courageous spirit and agile reasoning, undaunted Sir Avril. Thine argument prevaileth. . . . Sylphiane shall live and fare forth with thee for a space. . . . And my love goeth with her. . . . To thee I commend her who was very soul of my soul and heart of

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my heart. . . . With thee shall she share Mortal joy and sorrow. . . . And now . . . I am a-weary, and sore stricken in spirit, and would be gone. Farewell, Sylphiane, and bethink thee now and again in the new Life of one who held thee very dear. . . . Farewell! . . . Farewell!"

The very leafage seemed to echo this sorrowful word, as if thousands of gentle tongues joined in that sad adieu.

The Witches, heretofore muttering wicked imprecations, seeing us about to withdraw scatheless, became distraught with passion; and one with insolence harangued the Queen:

"Oh thou Ruler unjust; twisting thy Judgments to suit thy personal inclination, therein being false to thine own enactments, we scorn thy worthless pronouncements! Henceforth, yea, and redoubled, shall be red war between us and thee. Sooner or later shall we and those we serve attain our lawful ends, and thy Dryad become our prey. Perjured Queen, beware! We defy thee! . . . We have spoken!"

My love threw herself into my arms, hiding her face in my breast on hearing a challenge of such menace, and I was about to lead her away to set her on my steed tethered in the copse near by, when I tarried on hearing the voice of the Queen, no longer sad but raised in Regal wrath, mayhap the more enraged by reason of her turmoil of mind and grief in the loss of her favourite.

"Loathsome Harridans! dare ye thus to flout me, spawn of Satan? Ye speak of war? Then war shall it be! And well wot I who shall be the victor! Ho! Sulphurin! Ho! Rhinoceron! To me; To me; ye monsters, allies of mine Elfin State!"[1]

Then my love whispereth shudderingly thro' her tears, in terror anew: "She summoneth the Dragons! Let us away!"

Then did I hear a crashing of branches and the passage of heavy bodies forcing their way thereamong. And as I turned, I beheld the Hags hastily mounting astride their ungodly

[1] See Introduction—AUTHOR.

besoms to follow their master and fly from that place. But not so speedily did they go as that all escaped unharmed. For as my Sweet urging me, I half led, half carried her, to where my steed was, I beheld out of the corner of an eye one of the Beldams—or maybe a Vampire—flying over the spot we had but now left; with a fierce Dragon, roaring awesomely, in hot pursuit. The which leapt upon the Thing's shoulders, bearing it squealing to the ground. Then was there a cry of agony suddenly cut short, and a sound of furious snarling. . . .

The which I noted with inward satisfaction, my love clapping her hands to her ears to shut out the horrid noise of growling; and pressing me to depart with speed. And being come to my nag, the which with trembling limbs and in a lather of sweat was eager to be gone, I soothed him with the comfort of my presence and set Sylphiane thereon.

So I mounting, set her before me, and we rode away, I making for the Presbytery of the good Father Godwyn. And as we fared thither, my dear one's head close against my breast, said I:

"Dost regret, Sweet?"

"For the Queen, Yea; for myself Nay, and again Nay," said she, "so that my life be thine and spent with thee, I am filled with great joy and thankfulness which far overweigheth all repining and hath banished my puling fear; the which it were foolish of me to have harboured, knowing that thou, dearest Avril, were at my side."

Whereat I was fain to draw rein, while I kissed her; vowing that in all that Mortal man could do to deserve so sweet a maid, that would I do till my life's end.

And so we came to the Chapel. And what befell there the Reverend Father hath promised to set down with his own hand, for record of our wedded state.

And as I pause on these words, my dear Wife sitteth by me and with gay humour adjureth me to lay down my pen

for that I have writ enow. Therefore, my task done, I obey with love in my inmost heart; thanking Almighty God in that he hath, upon me so unworthy, bestowed the precious gift of a beloved Helpmate.

Praise the Lord, and Magnify His Name. Amen.

Writ by me; Avril de Pommereine, this XXVIII day of July Anno Domini MCCCCXXXVI.

CHAPTER II

The Forepart of The Chronicles of Father Godwyn

IT is in sooth a sad task that hath devolved upon me but it be at the desire of my late Lord and Seigneur. Therefore do I not shrink therefrom, though fain were I that it should have been entrusted to abler hands than mine own; yet forasmuch as I have some little clerkly knowledge, and have seen with mine own eyes and heard with mine own ears that of the which I am about to indite, it may peradventure be better that I, rather than another, should record, for who may tell what eyes shall see in time to come, the relation of the piteous happenings in all their sadness herein set forth.

And yet it must be that the Most High hath willed the mysteries whereon I shall discourse.

Let me begin at the beginning, and if my narration faltereth, remember it be writ but now and again in moments snatched 'mid intermissions from my Priestly duties. Moreover, oft the weakness of the flesh hath run counter to my wish to proceed therewith. Therefore prithee, ye who read, be gentle in judgment of my shortcomings.

Be it known that for over a score and ten years am I Priest in charge of the Chapel of St. Lydwell, in Dartymoor in the shire of Devon; which living be one of several which hath been in the gift of the Seigneurs of Pommereine from time wherein memory of man runneth not to the contrary; and later held, as I do now, appointment as Chappelaine to the Castle, with right of housing; but erstwhile found it too distant from the flock to which I am shepherd, and so remained in my Presbytery till later years; of which anon.

The Dryads

It was nigh unto two years ago on a certain evening about the Fall-of-leaf time and long after night had descended, that I sat in my Presbytery musing upon the lives of the Saints. The hour being late and I about to retire to my couch, a sound of knocking was heard at my postern gate as if someone—mayhap, methought, some belated traveller, as oft it befell—would crave admission and shelter till sunrise. It was never my wont to refuse such; therefore, laying down my Rosary, I took my lantern and hied me to the door. Whenas I oped it two persons stood there, of whom one spake unto me, and I knew the voice for that of Sieur Avril, whom I held in high respect and eke great love, since boyhood.

"May we enter, Father?" enquired he, "for I have a request of high import to make of thee."

"Enter, my son, with him that is with thee," I replied, and preceded them back to my sanctum. And then I saw in the light shed by my candle-sconce that his companion was youthful, slight of build, of boyish height and of goodly countenance, enwrapped almost down to heel in my Lord's cloak. Whereupon observing closely, I stood amazed to descry that it was no man but a woman, without shoon on her feet and wearing no hosen.

Then the Seigneur, proudly, with his arm about her, spoke words of astounding tenor:

"Behold my affianced wife, Father!"

"Thy affianced wife?" stammered I.

"Yea, verily," he responded, "and well I wot that this be news to thee. To which thy surprise I will add, for I would that thou shouldst wed us here and now."

"But, what may be her name and station, my son?" said I, halting in speech and in doubt, for well I knew my Lord to be upright in character and high of principle; yet, dwelling as I did, almost within the shadow of his Keep of Pommereine, and acquaint with the daily happenings therein, and having

heard no whisper of his betrothal, I was taken aback at a circumstance so unlooked for.

"Harken, Father," he said, "this lady is, and hath been these four months back, exceeding dear to me, and I do hold her in supreme honour and lasting love. Sylphiane is she hight, and till this night stood ever at the right hand of the Faerie Queen, and is herself a Dryad of Faerie birth."

"Lord save us! A Fay?" said I, crossing myself in no little alarm, for I knew that Warlocks and such oft did with wicked intent take upon themselves the guise of beauteous damsels. Therefore was I troubled in spirit.

"Nay, Father," saith the lady, as if reading my thoughts, and in sweet and gentle tone, "I am no Witch, nor aught of evil. See thou!" and she darted to the table whereon it lay, and taking up my Crucifix thereon, pressed it reverently to her forehead and then to her lips. "Could I so do were I a Witch or harboured evil intention?"

My wits were all abroad, but there being something of grace about her and her action, my heart warmed unto her, and I looked kindly upon her, even then all but convinced. Then did she kneel at my feet, crying "Shrive me, and give us thy blessing, oh Father Godwyn."

"How now! Thou knowest my name?" said I.

"Who of us did not?" she answered me. "All faerie folk know full well of thee and thy righteous and kindly disposition. Many's the time when seeing thee returning from some errand of mercy or healing, unknown to thee we have guided thy footsteps in darkness of night through treacherous places on the moor or in blinding mist, and brought thee hither in safety."

Then Sir Avril broke in:

"My dear lady hath in loving me, offended against the Faerie laws and hath been cast out, and hath thereby become Mortal even as we be. Her wings have been ta'en away by her Queen, and her very apparel stripped from her body, so

that she hath no garment upon her but my cloak. All this for her love of me, and I will not that this Pearl of Great Price enter Pommereine save as my wedded wife. Therefore, prithee Father, perform thy office and make us one until death do us part." And here he kis't the cross-hilt of his dagger and bowed his head in reverence to Him whose symbol it was. " There hath been no other woman in my life," he went on, " nor ever will be, save only this sweet maid, mine own Sylphiane. Lay thy hands, I adjure thee, upon her and consecrate her to me, and to me alone, her unworthy but true knight."

Marvelling much, I, a humble priest, could do no less than obey the behest of my Lord. " But," said I, " hast thou well considered this thing thou wouldst do ? "

" I have well considered it," he answered, " and happiness and peace of mind will be alien to me till, so far as lieth in my humble power, I have made atonement for that I have caused her Queen to visit her with displeasure. Come. Take thy Holy Book."

" But there should be exchange of rings," said I. " Hath the Lady Sylphiane aught of such ? "

" Yea, Father ! " answered she. " I have this ring which the Queen did not take from me. She herself bestowed it upon me in token of her love, and whether she forgot it, or whether she desired of that same love and of her sorrow, that I should retain it, I know not ; but it remaineth on my finger. Look upon this ! " and she held up her hand, whereon sparkled a circlet and thereon set all around its outer edge brilliant stones flashing fires of many colours, most beautiful to behold. Observing my admiration she saith, with her eyes on me, " The handiwork of my sisters ; dewdrops moulded by their magic art, into the form of these jewels, which shall lose lustre never."

" 'Twill serve the purpose," said I, " as well as it now becometh the wearer."

So then the Seigneur, having ta'en off his own signet, graven with his quarterings, and placed it on the Book, I did put it on her finger, marvelling at the softness and beauty thereof; she put her circlet on the Book also and with difficulty I placed it on the little finger of his left hand, the only one on which by reason of its size the ring would go, and pronounced the solemn words which made the twain irrevocably one.

And when I had done this they stood apart, looking trustfully the one at the other, saying naught, until Sir Avril stretching forth his arm drew her gently to him and they kis't in seemly manner, and then kis't again, and if ever I saw the happiness of Heaven shining in earthly eyes I saw it then.

Ah me! I am no longer young, and have made many man and wife, though at no time in such case as this, but never did I feel deeper conviction than on this occasion that this would be a marriage firmly grounded on mutual love and trust and approved by God and His Angels.

"Will ye bide here the night? For the hour is late and the rain falleth and the wind boisterous."

"Nay, Father, for we go to Pommereine. 'Tis bare a league hence, and my dear Lady must come at some raiment ere my servitors may see her in the morn. My palfrey waits without and I shall set her thereon, walking by her side."

"Shall I attend ye with my lantern?" said I, "for the woods be dark and the path rough."

"Nay, Father; we thank thee for thy courtesy," saith my Lord, "but we will not trouble thee. With the path I am well acquaint. Take thy rest. Attend me in the morn. And may God reward thee for the service thou hast rendered us this night. And now we will fare forth, we twain. Our lives henceforth are one; she my Woman and I her Man, till God shall call us hence. So, Father, once more bestow on us thy blessing ere we depart."

And this I gladly did and they withdrew; I meditating on

what had gone before, and commending them to the protection of the Most High.

Then lying on my truckle bed I fell into a sleep and dreamed a marvellous dream, that in my humble chamber were shadowy Beings gazing down upon me, and that I heard soft voices whispering unto me that though Sylphiane had gone from them, and had become a child of earth, they rejoiced that she had entered into the new life under the spiritual protection of Mother Church. Then methought I heard them softly saying in farewell, " Sleep, good Father, sleep ; we shall not forget thee."

Yet was it a fantasy ? For in the morn when I arose I found two lily-plants of great richness and in full bearing beside my door where lilies had not been wont aforetime to grow, and my ancient Crucifix gone, and in place thereof one of ivory, set on each point with a shining stone resembling those in the Lady Sylphiane's ring, also bearing the effigy of Our Lord on the Cross wrought in pure gold thereon ; the whole being verily of rich and goodly appearance. And when later I enquired of the Seigneur and my Lady whether they had done this thing, he answered No, that he had no hand in it, nor knew aught of it ; and she, " Accept it, Father, without question ; although not from me, certes I have little doubt whence it came. It be outward sign of the gratitude of my sisters—mayhap even of their Queen—in that thou accepted me for what I am and did not, holding me Pagan, turn me from thy door."

And the same Crucifix, which I have ever called Sylphiane's cross, hangs about my neck as I indite these very words, and shall be buried with me when I die, for I came to hold the Lady Sylphiane in great honour and affection, and to love her as if she had been mine own sister.

Alas ! That the time proved so short ; but I must not let my pen outstrip orderly recital of what came to pass.

On the morn after the joining, and oft thereafter, did I

repair to Pommereine, and saw full well how happy were the bridal couple; the Lady Sylphiane assuming position and duties with an air of dignity amazing to witness; knowing as I did her previous history. In all things she adapted herself to her new life in such wise that no one, ignorant of her Pagan origin, would have ta'en her for any other but a lady of high degree. In the manner of her ordering of her affairs and her servitors she bore herself with consideration and warm kindliness which endeared her to all with whom she held converse. And it was good to see how the Seigneur followed her with his eyes in affectionate admiration as she, graceful as a fawn, went on her several occasions.

. . . . .

And so passed one, and better than a half of another, year, when, the Annunciation not long past, on a certain eve as I returned from the Castle to my Chapel, a thing befell, causing me much tribulation of soul.

On several nights prior thereto had my mind received dim impression, as I wended my way through the thick woods of Pommereine, that Black Shadows, not cast by the foliage, were flitting about the Castle and encircling forests, now on the ground, now above me in mid-air. At first, methought 'twere some trick of my senses, but this night that I now speak of, I plainly did see in a glade where fell a patch of moonlight, a Witch furtively slinking in the deeper shadows 'neath the trees.

Fingering my beads I went boldly on, conceiving she would avoid me. Yet observing my approach, she stood her ground and with a cackle of eerie laughter, called to me:

"'Tis thou, then, thou greasy Priest!"

Now though I was, and am still, of full habit, I did not choose that I should be called so, and in some anger I responded:

"Begone, Pestilence!"

"Are not the woods free to me and mine as they are to thee, double-chinned chaunter of Masses? Time enow whenas my mission and that of my sisters be ended that I depart elsewhere, at mine own inclination, not at thy bidding!"

"No mission can be thine, foul servant of Sin, save to work evil and misery!" quoth I.

"My mission is to assure the rights of me and my kin; therefore shall I proceed upon it, and without leave of thee, Oh Pastor of the Paunch!"

"Handmaid of the Devil! Ye have no rights! Scorned by Him whom I serve; hated by mortal man; Outlaws of Heaven art thou and thy Hell-brood! Stand aside from my path and hinder me not!"

"Not so wouldst thou address that Outlaw of Faeriedom, the Lady Sylphiane. Wait thou, and see what she shall become. Aye, and the child to be born also when that we have our due."

At these words chill hands seemed to grip my heart and throat, and for a moment horror held me dumb. Whereat she laughed again shrilly; "Thou hast forgot, oh Godwyn of the Great Girth, that which the Lord of Pommereine hath told thee—that his Lady was erst of the Dryads. She it was when fallen from her High Estate, who should for penalty have come to be sport of us and the Vampires, but escaped through unjust leniency of her Queen, biassed by love for her whilom handmaid. Yet ever the time fast approacheth when we shall exact our rights, and Mother and Child—one or other or both —shall be ours!"

At this my anger overcame the fear in my breast and I struck at her with my staff but met naught but empty air, for evading my aim, she rose on her besom high above me, disappearing with unearthly chuckling marring the stillness of the night, and after her sped with heavy beating wing, a Vampire whom I had not till then observed, leaving me vexed in spirit and knowing not what I should do.

When I had shut myself in my Presbytery I prayed long for guidance. And my duty became clear before me. At dawn therefore did I retrace my steps with speed to the Castle, desiring the sentinels to cause my Lord to be roused from sleep and brought to have speech with me. Which done, I imparted to him all that had befallen me, whereat he was in sore travail of spirit, and besought me to remain at Pommereine for a sennight or more, "for," saith he, "I can withstand mortal attack, but if Evil threaten from the supernatural forces of Hell, I may hope to avert it only by the power of the Cross and the sprinkling of Holy Water. Therefore do thou, Father, remain with us for a space."

And this I promised to do, first sending for Brother Ambrose of the See of Excestre[1] to perform my Chapel duties meanwhile. And I set myself to make the sign of the Cross on all approaches to the Castle, and all inner doors I wet with water from the stream that is called Jordan in the Holy Land. Also chanted I masses on every battlement to avoid Spirits of evil and malice. And lo and behold! some nights later, as I gazed from the watchtower in the twilight, the meadows round the Castle meseemed to be astir with black formless shapes, some a-hover and gazing expectantly and threateningly at the apartment where the Lady Sylphiane lay.

Therefore did I hold my Crucifix high above my head crying in a loud voice:

"Approach not closer, bond-slaves of Satan! For naught can avail ye; by the power of this symbol I scorn ye!"

But alas! Sylphiane heard me and sensed what was afoot, calling in terror to her husband:

"The Witches! the Witches! Why are they here that Father Godwyn so exhorteth them?" And swooned away.

That night was born to her a daughter, baptized within an hour of her birth, I making the sign of the Cross with Holy Water upon her forehead, and giving her, as desired by her

[1] Exeter.—AUTHOR.

Mother, the name of "Faie"; and lo! as I did so, heard by none but myself and enduring but for an instant, there was a sound of gay music and of silv'ry tongues uplift in praise; and after that I had returned the child to her mother I looked forth from the casement, and behold! gone were the black shapes which erstwhile had been thereabout, save one Harridan of Hell, which with a terrible malediction screamed as she slow departed:

"For this once hast thou prevailed, Sir Priest, yet a time will presently come when shall it be otherwise. Maybe in a week; mayhap in a month; decision remaineth with us! Nor all thy prayers and telling of Beads shall then avail. Mark thou that well, thou Lump of Lard!"

So saying, she swift flew through the air and disappeared, leaving me heavy at heart, a heaviness which was to be tenfold increased ere many suns had set.

For the Lady Sylphiane fell into a low fever, and in spite of all the Leech and the Wise Women summoned could do to ease her, she lost strength until a month thence she lay at the point of death.

. . . . .

Here must I pause in my writing, for my hand shaketh, and mine eyes become dim with tears.

. . . . .

At the last, weakly she whispered to me:

"Father, I am called hence, and I would fain commend to thy watch and ward my adored Avril and my sweet babe."

With breaking voice did I avow that whiles breath remained in my body, so long would I observe faithfully her sacred charge. And then did she smile at me. . . . And held out her arms to her husband, sighing softly as she laid her head against his breast. . . .

In such wise an hour or so later, her sweet Soul took wing.

. . . . .

For many hours after her passing, Sir Avril was as one turned to stone, resisting all attempts at solace. Even me he motioned away, muttering: "Leave me alone with her who was and is not."

I withdrew a little space and wrapped in mine own grief waited for a while; then softly I left the chamber and sought the nurses in charge of the babe. Her I took sleeping in mine arms and returned to the Seigneur, approaching him, saying naught, but holding out the child to him.

He gazed at her as one wakened from sleep, and bowing his head on his arms, cried:

"Oh Faie, daughter of Sylphiane, what a heavy price have I paid for thee!"

And then suffered me to lead him thence.

. . . . .

It was I and the good Kenelm, the Seneschal, who saw to all that was required, and by direction of Sir Avril, we twain dug in the woods a grave on a certain spot—pointed out by him as being where he and his sweet wife first met—in which to shroud the mortal remains of the gentlest Lady known to me in the course of a long life.

Thrice had the sun set after her passing when we laid her to rest at midnight, 'mid the flare of torchlight, and to the chaunting of Requiem by Boy Singers from the Fane of Excestre lent by my Lord Bishop. At the close, Sir Avril, up till then bearing himself like a man in a dream, bade his retainers return to the Castle. This done, and when the tramp of their footsteps had died away in the stillness of the night, I, who with Kenelm had stayed nigh unto him, saw him stand looking down into the grave, and so did he remain for a long time.

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Then did he beckon to Kenelm and kiss him on both cheeks, then motioned him back and called upon me to approach. Taking me by the hand, he said in a firm voice :

" Father, life hath no worth without her. I go to join her. To thee I commend my daughter. Watch over her and preserve her from all harm. Care for her. Be thou her shield. Prithee, keep for her my ring wherewith I wedded her dear mother, and this also wherewith she wedded me, and bestow them on Faie in due season. And set down in writing this tale of mischance to a Faerie Sprite, who but for me had remained happy among her companions, a thing of laughter and bliss eternal, and would even now be alive. Set it down, I say, that for me she surrendered all, and becoming Mortal, hath laid down her life. And read thy and my writings unto Faie when she shall be of an age to be told, and to weep for her departed Mother."

Then did I give my promise, and sadly he smiled upon me, saying :

" And now, bestow on me thy blessing, oh Father in God, true and loyal friend on earth, ere I bid thee a last farewell."

I would have spoken though my tears rained adown my cheeks, but he silenced me, and knowing not what I should do, and with wet eyes and my wits in a whirl, I laid my hands on his head in the Name of the Blessed Trinity, and then, as he wished, withdrew the length of half a bowshot, and stood with Kenelm, watching him whom we both loved.

And we seemed to hear soft rustlings 'mid the leafage, and I looked round in dread of the Witch, her terrible menace too well remembered. But then sounds of soft kindly voices, whispering, reached mine ears, and seemed to breathe some measure of comfort and courage into my bruised Soul, and I bent my gaze again on my Lord.

And lo ! suddenly he stood erect, looking skyward, and in a loud voice cried :

"Sylphiane! Beloved! I come!"

And there was a flash of rosy light, and for one fleeting moment of time did I seem to descry white-robed figures descending, and then soaring again. And I beheld a flame of exceeding brightness flash starlike from the ground whereon he had stood and rapidly wend up, up, and ever up, into the Heavens. And I heard a joyous sound of Trumpets far above, and a burst of glorious song, like unto a Hymn of Praise, such as I never heard aforetime, nor ever shall hear again this side of the tomb. And once more I heard the whispering among the trees.

Kenelm and I, our hearts beating rapidly, looked each other in the face questingly, then hastened forward.

But no sign was to be seen of Sir Avril. Furthermore, when in awe we looked down where rested the coffin, marvel of marvels! the lid thereof was flung aside and the Casket empty.

As we fell on our knees, I holding Sylphiane's Crucifix in my clasped hands, I heard again that burst of triumphant melody from above and a beating as it were of wings a-flutter, and voices coming from where I knew not, softly chanting, "Be of good cheer, worthy Father; thy Lord and his Lady are with the Blessed and Pure in Heart, for evermore united in Heaven as were they upon earth. Therefore, praise God, and take comfort in the thought that thy beloved Avril and Sylphiane stand ever in the sight of the Lord."

And we rose from our knees, and in sorrow and yet also in devout thankfulness, returned to Pommereine, where I spent the night in Prayer and Fasting, in close communion with Him who had those loved ones in His keeping.

Thus passed a noble of England and a noble Englishman to the realms Above, whither his adoring helpmeet had preceded him and, I firmly believe, had with the consent and approval of Almighty God, summoned him to follow.

When in the morn their Lord returned not, and Kenelm being distraught with grief, I it was who summoned the Men-at-arms and Lackeys and related to them what I had seen; whereat they marvelled greatly, and mourned for many days.

Writ thus farre ye Daie following ye Sabbath
yclept Adventus MCCCCXXXVII.

GODWYN,
Priest.

CHAPTER III

Ye Narratioun of Kenelm, ye Seneschalle of Pommereine

IT is then between us understood, most Reverend Father, that I (having ever been a man of deeds rather than of words, and possessing but small gift of ready speech—and that but rough—moreover none at all of the use of writing implements) shall perpend unto thee and thou shalt set down in scholarly phrase all that I tell thee of the Sieur Avril and his sweet wife, and of the childhood of our winsome little lady Faie, and whiles she was yet full of life and laughter. Agreed? Then will I make full disclosure; for there are matters whereon I would unburden my soul. To which I shall come in due order.

As thou well knowest, Father, I—being of good yeoman stock—who by Grace of God and the will of our whilom Lord, be now Seneschal of Pommereine, was in my hot youth by nature bold and reckless. Our Seigneur Sir Avril, being about to depart to win his spurs over seas, I, a scion of those who had served his forbears, and being skilled in the practice of the Bow, besought him that I might accompany him thither to be his body-guard and in close attendance on his person. Which boon, after some demur by reason of my not having attained years of discretion (for I had seen but sixteen summers) he at length conceded. Nor I ween—and that without conceit—that his mind thereafter misgave him therefor. Certes he saved my life when hard pressed by foemen on divers occasions, and I, on my part, received wounds that elsewise might have been his.

Much warfare and strife did we together encounter; many the privations we shared; until after that Saint Dennis had proven himself stronger than Saint George, and we English were like to be driven by the Franks headlong into the Sea; also after Joan the Maid—shame on her countrymen and eke on mine—had been condemned to death and cruelly burnt at the Stake in a city yclept Rouanne; we, detesting so foul an offence 'gainst a brave woman, returned to these shores; I as thou seest Father, halt in one leg; mark of Frankish sword-cut from eye to lip; and having perforce to use my left arm where other men do use their right.

Then did Sir Avril, in more than quittance of my poor service, continue my attendance upon him and confer on me advancement, for saith he (being ever of gay and lightsome humour), it were so long sin he had fent for himself I must needs remain at hand, for he had forgot the manner of donning and doffing his apparel, and I must be by to see that he wore not his shirt outermost, 'stead of 'neath his mail.

So for nigh three years did we bide together, he minding his Estate, and controlling, but not stinting, expenditure of moneys thereon; and eke doing justice between man and man 'mong his Copyholders, and the neatherds and hinds ploughing, sowing and reaping on the lands that were his.

His leisure-time spent he in sport in the field and in close study of the rolls in his Muniment Room; the while I at his right hand rejoiced, and so likewise did Jennifer my wife whom I had not long wed, to do him loyal service.

Aye, and so did all with him acquaint.

Well do I mind me of a certain morn in the sweet of the year, when he summoned me to his presence addressing me thus:

"Kenelm; I have no wife; but thou hast. There was a time when thou wert not wed. Now, doughty Seneschal and erstwhile comrade-in-arms, I know not the ways of women as dost thou. . . ."

"Crave pardon, Sire, nay! I have now three years been wed, and I trow I know not yet mine own wife, so varied are her moods and so quick the turn of her mind."

"So sayest thou; but there be one thing thou must and dost know, to wit, whether she love thee or no."

"Aye, that do I know; I would answer in that regard with my very life."

"Then, Kenelm, tell me who am ignorant, what made thee first sure that she loved thee?"

"Sire," said I after taking thought, and marvelling at his inquiry, for never before spake he to me of women, "the manner of it were simple. I kissed her heartily, and in return gat a buffet on my face. Whereupon I kissed her again, saying, 'I love thee, Lass, dost love me?' 'Nay,' saith she, 'thou girt lout, I love not clod-polls!' On that did I kiss her again, and vow I would marry her within the space of two sennights, her answer being that she would not wed me were I last man on earth. 'I'fackins!' said I, 'were I last man on earth I might not desire to marry thee. But that is as may be, wilt have me for thy man?' 'I will na,' saith she, with toss of curls; 'how! wed one with ugly face like thine?' 'I cannot mend my scarred cheek,' said I. And then she flushed rose-red and wept, crying, 'No, no; I meant not that; verily I meant not that! My foolish tongue spoke, but not my heart. In sooth, if I wed not thee, I wed no other.' And then . . . she placed her lips on mine and then on my slit jowl, God bless her. After which she tweaked my forelock till mine eyes watered. And in due time did Father Godwyn join us i' Chapel."

"Didst thou indeed kiss her first, she willy-nilly?" asked he with wrinkled brow.

"Verily, that I did; for if I loved her not, I should not kiss her. And if I kissed her not, how should she know that I loved her? But wherefore dost ask me all this, of which I have spoken to no man?"

For tho' I have no store of subtlety, I am not wholly a fool, and moreover am direct of reasoning and bluff of speech. Therefore going to the core of the matter, and by right of the hurts I had gotten for him, said I, " Who may she be that thou dost hanker after ? "

Whereat his brows met frowning, and he gazed at me sternly, as if in anger at my forthrightness. Then his eyes softened and he broke into a laugh, and thou knowst Father what a jolly sound it were from his lips, and replied, " Oh thou cunning fox ! yet thy mind overfloweth and outstrippeth truth ; art wrong !—there be no woman in my life," and turning away he saith 'neath his breath, " and small chance that there ever be one."

" That shall be as the Almighty willeth," I answered stubbornly. " Thou art comely and of brave bearing. If I, scarred as I be and with a left leg that bendeth not at the knee, could yet achieve my sweet Jennifer, there is greater hope for thee, oh beloved Master. And when that thou hast found thy Mate, I swear my life shall be hers, as it hath been thine these many years past."

Thereat my Lord took my hand in his, placing his other on my shoulder and saith, " It boots not to tell me so, for full well hast thou proven thy worth, oh faithful Kenelm."

An idle interchange of words betwixt us, which I nigh forgot until later when had I reason to put two and two together and make them four.

For well do I recall what befell in dead of a certain night in the October following, when, as had oft then of late been his wont, he had gone out towards nightfall, as he saith, to set snares. He took not me with him, for when I had offered he had said the fewer the better, and so less risk of scaring shy quarry. And yet he seemed to have no good fortune ; ever returning empty handed ; and twice did he omit to take nets and other gear and yet came not back for them.

Narrative of Kenelm, the Seneschal

It were an hour after midnight, and I abed, when a man-at-arms smote the lintel of my door with sword-hilt crying,

"Mistress Jennifer! Mistress Jennifer! waken; thy Lord ordereth thee to attend him forthwith!"

Quoth I sleepily, "Didst say Jennifer? Of a certainty thou hast mistook. It be not her but I whom he summoneth."

"Nay, nay," he saith, "he hath but now entered with another wrapped in his own cloak, and he plainly saith he requireth thy wife and no other."

Whiles this went forward, Jennifer had risen and, apparelling herself, bade me hold my peace and sleep on: afterwards avowing that her woman's wit told her on the instant what was toward, whereon unbelieving, said I, "Hast then gift of second sight?" but she derided me, dubbing me a "girt mumphead."

When she had gone forth, I marvelled greatly that she should be thuswise summoned, but turning on my side, 'gan again to court slumber; but in a brief space was I 'ware that she had returned and was even then on her knees before the armoire wherein she kept her fal-lals, routing therein with quick fingers and murmuring,

"Oh, the Sweeting!"

"What dost say?" I said, somewhat drowsily.

"Eyes clear as crystal!"

"Who hath?" I asked.

"And how gracious a manner in saying 'tis shameful to give thee this travail at such an hour.' A lamb; and verily like unto an Angel from Heaven in form and face."

Whereat I leapt from my pallet and shook her by the shoulders, crying, "Woman, what is't thou art maundering about, with thy lambs and angels?"

"Loose me, girt gawk," said she, bending again to the press. "Thou dost not know. The Seigneur . . . nay," she broke off and saith unto herself, "these hosen hath holes therein; they will not beseem the wearer."

"Yea, yea," cried I with impatience, "the Seigneur? what of him?"

Quoth she, taking up a kirtle, scanning it closely as tho' I were far from her mind, "This may serve, though rough in texture," so that I were fain to jog her arm, when saith she—shaking me off—"If thou must know, he hath brought in a wife, to whom within the hour he hath been joined by our good Father Godwyn."

"Wife?" said I in amaze.

"Verily; and she hath no raiment upon her body. Delay me not; all shall be made clear to thee anon." And gathering in her arms a mort of garments such as women do wear, she trapesed out of the room in great haste, dropping a stomacher here, and a smock there, leaving me in bewilderment.

"Wife?" mused I; "no garments? and married within the hour by the Father? What mysteries be these? Howbeit, 'tis my Lord's affair, not mine; I ken naught of it. Unbidden I put my finger in no man's pie"; and made again to lay me down, when I heard my Lord's voice without, calling upon me, "Ho! Kenelm! Kenelm! Come hither!"

"Sire," answered I, "I be abed, but will straightway attire myself and be with thee on the instant."

And when I had quickly so done, I found him waiting in great buoyancy of spirit.

"Come thou with me!" saith he, "thou Guide, Counsellor and Friend, and eke Fox also, and see what I have to show thee!" then taking me by the arm, he drew me into a room where was my wife, also a lady of gracious presence, lovelier than any I had seen, yea, even among the fair women of the Franks. But tell not Jennifer I said this.

The Sieur led me toward her and saith,

"Behold the valiant Kenelm; my Seneschal and thine," and to me, "Before thee is the Lady Sylphiane de Pommereine, my lawful wedded wife, henceforth to receive thy duty as I have done these many years."

And the lady with dignified mien and kindly withal, gazing upon me saith, "I have heard much report of thee, Master Kenelm, and all of it good. Full well do I know that but for thy gallantry on divers occasions, I had not stood here the wife of the Sieur de Pommereine."

I looked her straight in the eye, as it is my habit to do, whether it be man or woman, and was heartened thereby. Then lumbering on to one knee, my left leg stretching stiffly out before me, I took her hand and kissed it; when did I feel a gentle pressure upward as she raised me to my feet, murmuring, "Brave men do not deserve to kneel, least of all to a weak woman. It is for the woman to honour him who hath preserved for her the life of her Husband," saying which, she made me, aye! me! humble servitor as I be, lowly obeisance as unto the King himself.

I knew not where to look, so confused was my mind, and all I could think to say was, "I would I had first combed my hair!"

Jennifer plucked my sleeve with "Numskull! hast thou no glibber tongue wherewith to acknowledge so great an honour?"

Saith my Lord to me and my wife, "Return now to thy rest. Attend me in the morn, friend Kenelm, and we will speak more of this matter." Therefore I withdrew, bearing with me for alway before my vision the sweet picture of my Lady as she stood there, be-garbed in raiment of Jennifer, her look following me with the smile that I was to come to know was never far from her eye and lip.

It boots not to relate what my Lord revealed to me, as also to thee, Father, under promise of secrecy; for thou hast it within thine own ken. The which promise have we kept, and I even from my wife, who to this day thinketh, or mayhap letteth me think she thinketh, I spake truth when I said that inasmuch as the Lady Sylphiane were of Cornish birth, she and her kinsmen were unused to apparelling themselves in

such a manner as did we, and therefore need for clothing borrowed until such time as attire could be procured of a quality suitable to her rank and station.

For the rest, how my Lady, and straightway after her, my dear Lord, departed hence, needs not for me to add to thy knowledge ; and 'tis well, for Time hath not so softened to me the pain of loss that I can dwell thereon without tremor of voice and shedding an unmanly tear.

But I will carry my testimony to the time of the growing-up of their daughter, the little Lady Faie, whom Jennifer, bless her fond heart, tended from the hour of birth in place of the child the Almighty hath not seen fit to give us.

The Maid waxed strong, lusty, and ruddy of countenance, also of exceeding beauty, favouring much in looks her Sainted Mother. Me specially did she make her Playmate, and it was her delight to be set on my shoulder and ride thereon ; invoking me by the name of " Kellen." Her call of " Kellen ! Kellen ! where art thou ? " would bring me eftsoons to obey her childish behests. And as she grew older, and in wisdom beyond her years, I related to her many tales of her Father and his prowess in battle. Also, because of her questionings thereon, did I tell her the reason of my halting gait, and how came the scar on my face ; whereon I mind me well how she kissed it, whispering, " Poor Kellen ; dear Kellen ; I love you so. . . ."

Now one day about her fourth Summer it came to pass that I found her in her Pleasaunce, weaving, untaught by me or mine, a daisy-chain. Busy were her fingers, and deft withal, and so enwrapped in meditation was she, that she heard not my approach 'cross the sward till my shadow fell athwart her.

Quoth I : " Who hath shewn thee the trick of uniting these flow'rets ? "

" The little Child-women so instructed me," she saith.

"What little Child-women?" asked I wonderingly, for our wenches were buxom and none of small stature.

"The gay Little Ones with wings a-shine, who daily come to play with me, and to speak of my Mother; betimes fondling me."

Hearing her speak thus, methought 'twere childish fancies or phantoms of her dream-hours; yet asked I with an air of gravity,

"Wherefore play they not with poor Kellen, and caress him also?"

"I earnestly besought them so to do," she answered, "but seemeth they may not be seen by thee, nor may speak with any Mortal, save only such as be tiny, like unto me."

"Dost know names whereby suitably to address them?" asked I, falling into her mood.

"Yea, two there be, I know full well, own sisters to my Mother. Oft do they kiss me and sometimes weep over me; one yclept Violas and the other Floreal."

"Who told thee so?" questioned I, for these were not names she was like to hear from the Castle folk.

"They did," she answered simply. "And they be kind to me and tell me wondrous tales of where they dwell; and how that my Mother whilom lived also with them. Also of their beloved Queen hight Hyacinth, have they spoken."

Her prattle somewise disturbed me for me-feared she might be sickening for a malaise. Therefore did I call for the Leech, who ministered unto her, and then did he laugh loud and long at me, saying, "There is naught amiss with the little Maiden. Be easy in thy mind, Master Seneschal. Fear nothing, and look not for Boggarts round corners. She is hale and well. My word upon it."

So I let it pass.

Again, i'th'summer after this, one day did Jennifer come running, saying; "Look, Kenelm! On the lawn without.

Is she not sweet. But hist! let her not know she be observed."

And gazing in stealthy fashion I beheld the little one, who having with great labour doffed her garments, was barefoot and naked but for her shift, happily dancing and singing to her own shadow, waving her arms this way and that. After watching awhile Jennifer ran out and caught her, tossing her in the air, and kissing her; and when she had drest her, brought her to me, when said I,

"Wherefore did'st strip and skip ungarbed?"

"I did as the Child-women do," she answered, "ofttimes do they come and so dance before me; the day and warmth of Sun entreated me to join with them."

"Were they with thee then, Sweeting?"

"For a while, yea, but flew off when Jennifer caught me."

"Well," quoth I, "I love to see thee happy, but the Child-women are maybe inured to lack of raiment, but thou art in different case. Dance with them an thou wilt, but shed no more than thy outermost robe, lest thou get cold, and have to lie abed, and be tended by the Leech and partake of decoctions dispensed by him but displeasing to the taste."

Again upon the fifth anniversary of her birth, on which day thou hadst gone afar off to visit the sick, she came not in from the garden to the Refectory at midday as was her custom; nor later. On search being made for her we found her not. Then were Jennifer and I sore troubled, and dispatched riders thro' the woods and meadows calling upon her name and to come forth, but only the winds answered. And my heart grew cold in my breast, and Jennifer and I evaded gaze each of the other. Until at Sundown I heard the maid's voice calling 'Kellen; Kellen!' and hasting to her Chamber, there lay she on her cot happily smiling, and holding out her little arms to me.

"Where hast been, Sweeting?" asked I, my speech a-quiver, yet felt I as tho' a weight had fallen from me.

"The Child-women took me to their Bower, and there have I been all this day, sporting with them; and they made much of me till they brought me hither."

"Brought thee hither? How? For we have been a-search for thee high and low, all of us, and yet we saw thee not enter."

"I know not how I fared forth, nor how I returned," saith she. "Methinks they bore me aloft in a twinkling; I cannot tell; and oh, Kellen, they carried me into the presence of a beautiful lady wearing a golden crown, and with a rod a-glitter in her hand, the which she laid down, and took me to her bosom saying, 'and thou art the child of my so-loved Sylphiane,' and kissed me many times. And then bowed her head and wept, so that her tears fell on my face. Wherefore did she so?"

I ventured no response; for meseemed to be in presence of too deep a mystery for my simple understanding. Hence I put the question aside, and instead asked,

"Art not an-hungered, little one?"

"Nay indeed," saith she, "for they gave me warm milk in plenty; also honey and cream, with sweet liquor from the flower cups storing it therein. And in due time, the lovely lady took me again in her arms, pressing me close, and saith 'twere time all good little girls were abed; and bade the Child-women have great care for me, for that I was exceeding dear to her; and then besought me to kiss her, and then again, and again, as tho' loth to part with me. And saith I must come to her again many times ere I shall be of the age of ten years, but not later, yet that I shall be borne in mind thereafter. Now why said she that, Kellen?"

Alas for my dull brain; for still did I think these were dream-fancies. Else Father, I ween, I had spoken to thee thereon. For I trow now—like Mother; like daughter; and her blood made her kin to her Mother's folk. Then in thankfulness that no harm had befallen her, I called to

Jennifer; and it warmed my heart to behold the joy of my sweet wife on finding the child safe and sound.

I questioned her whether the maid had said aught to her of the reason of her absence, but it appeared that the child being over-tired, had said only her prayers, falling-aslumber in midst thereof, and was even then sound asleep. Nor do I think the little one, I trow not why, spoke freely to my Jennifer anent the Child-women as she did to me.

Other occasions there were when she hath perpended to me of her blissful visits to radiant scenes there to be greeted by the lovely lady, but not for so long an absence; and ever she saith, 'twere o'nights she fared thither.

Come I now to her seventh birthday; a day of closeness it was, with no breath of wind astir, and the clouds mantling above as tho' thunder pending. Yet no rain had fallen, and so we let the child into the Pleasaunce of greensward which runneth below the casements of our apartments; bidding her not go from there lest storm burst. Which she promised; and never did she make promise and break it. On morn of that day whereof I speak, thou mayest recall thou hadst come to her but had departed about the hour of noon.

'Twere my habit to rest awhile after midday repast, therefore first looking outward and assuring myself that all was well with her, I fell into a light doze. In the which methought I heard a voice like unto that of Lady Sylphiane, but in sore travail, whispering, "Kenelm! Kenelm! arouse thee, quickly!"

I sat up, bemused with sleep, and again the voice did urge me—"Faie! Faie! oh Master Kenelm!"

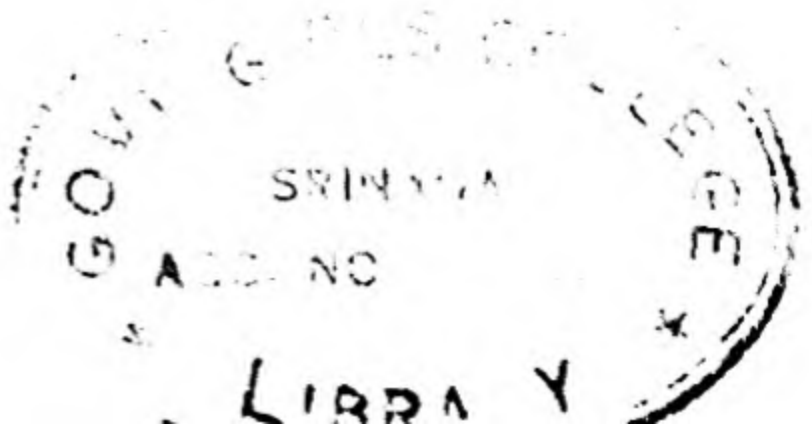
Thereupon I looked forth from the balcony into the garden, and there I saw a damsel of comely mien, richly drest, but unknown to me, having speech with the little one. Marvelling who she might be, I observed her closely, and beheld her stoop to take the child in her arms, yet with something of

furtiveness and quick glances about her. I misliked that look, and was about to descend and question her, when as she bent down, what was my horror and affright to observe a cloven foot peep out from beneath her kirtle. Then in a loud voice did I call upon the Lord. Thereat the woman, in the twinkling of an eye, was not, but in her stead was a skinny Hag clothed in garb of ebon hue. And I knew her for a Witch, with evil design. Gathering up the child she 'gan swift to run across the sward.

The height at which I stood was too great for me to spring forth save at peril of broken neck, and casting up my eyes in despair, they rested on my Bow, the same which erstwhile I bore south of Callis, hanging on the wall with quiver of arrows close at hand. In haste seizing and stringing it, and fitting thereto a shaft, I sped it after the Hag, by then about to gain with her burden the shadows of the dense undergrowth and wooded places. My aim had been true, and the Witch, struck on the arm, let fall Faie, and with screech of pain and anger blent faced round, assailing my ears with terrible imprecation. Again I called on the Most High and she turned to flee; whereat I let fly another missile, the which struck her in the hind-quarters, whereon with a howl of rage she vanished out of sight 'mong the trees.

Never until then knew I that with my stiff leg, could I traverse the stairway with such speed as then I summoned up, and coming out of the Postern I hied me to the little Maid, and lifting her up, found in joy and thankfulness she had sustained no hurt, nor was afeared, but rather in bewilderment as she saith wonderingly, "pretty lady and old woman both gone; did'st see them?"

My tongue cleaving unto my palate I could not speak at that moment, but taking her within and committing her to my wife and the maids, I hasted along the track of the Witch —I having some knowledge of woodcraft. On the way I espied my two arrows, one with stain of blood, and both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bearing sign of scorching, but I came not up with the Devil-hag else had I broke her skull for her.

I own to my lasting sorrow that it had been better had I spoken unto thee of this thing, but me-feared thou might'st deem I had but poorly performed my portion of the Maiden's wardship; and thus incur thy reproof.

Thenceforward never did I let the Lass be out of ken of myself and of at least one other.

Also did I at her tenth birthday, whereon happened a thing thou wottest of, acquire the Bloodhound Wolfram, a beast of great size and fierce mien and with little liking for strangers, but withal of gentle disposition toward those to him familiar. How great was the pleasure of the little maid on first beholding him! he fawning upon her and licking her hands and face in boisterous greeting. By ordering it so that she alone placed before him his daily sustenance and making much of him, to her he became from the first as a shadow—where one was, there was the other. Oft have I seen him, and thou also, Father, with his noble head upon her knee, or upon her lap, steadfastly regarding her as she sat on the sward, ever on guard of his little Mistress, yea, even lying across her door as she slept o' nights. About his neck I placed a Medallion bearing the image and superscription of St. Leofric, whereon, on my importuning thee, thou bestowed thy blessing.

Full many an hour did she pass with the great dog, chattering gaily to him and he answering with his eyes, or wag of tail and twitch of ear.

Wolf did she call him, finding "Wolfram" irksome to her tongue; and when I said to her "but a Wolf is a savage beast, the enemy, not the friend of man," she saith, "but this is good Wolf not bad Wolf"; and tho' much did I doubt whether a good wolf could anywhere be found, I baulked not her humour.

It was, I ween, because of the Hound, and also maybe of fear of my skill with the Bow, that no further persecution

" Fitting thereto a shaft, I sped it after the Hag."
The Dryads

(See p. 55)

GOVT. GIRLS COLLEGE
SRINAGA
ACC. NO.....

followed until that dire night that both thou and I wot of, and whereof I dare not trust myself to speak; when plunged in over-deep slumber caused by unholy Witchcraft of malice aforethought, no sound did I hear till thy voice aroused me.

Fond she was of all living things of fur and feather, and much of my lore of field and forest did I impart to her willing ear. And she would not—nay nor would her Mother—partake of any dish of meat or fowl, but only of fruits of the earth and green herbs and the like; seemingly taking no harm but rather waxing lusty thereon. Well do I recall the day when I showed her the Coney I had snared; and of her first stroking gently its still body and weeping sore, and then turning to rend me for the slaying thereof. "Natheless, little one," said I, humbly, when she paused to take breath, "the Almighty hath given these creatures for food of Man; therefore is it not meet and right that in gratitude we should snare and eat them?"

"I know not;" she saith in great wrath, "but I trow not; for hath He not given us also the gentle green growths for sustenance?"

"Aye," I made answer, "truly He hath so also done, but bethink thee, Mistress Faie; vegetation doth not make prey of Man; shouldst thou meet a Lion in the path, he would belike bite and eat thee. 'Tis his nature. Why, even Wolfram hath his meat, and bones wherewith to clean his fangs!"

"The Lion and Wolf know no better, Master Seneschal" (and so addressing me showed her displeasure though 'twere indeed seldom), "but the dear little Conies are in different case. They attack not Man. Hast ever been bitten by a rabbit, Master Seneschal?"

"Nay," I answered, "I cannot call to mind any such happening."

"Also, Master Seneschal, didst thou not give me a tamed one for my pleasuring; only it died?"

"Aye!" said I, in triumph, "and did it not eat only of green stuff; wherefore it lived not?"

"I cannot cope with thy greater power of argument," saith she, "but this I know, that my Child-women besought me never to eat of aught that had had life and been slain. And am I not acquaint with every bird and every fourfooted thing in the Forest—do they not come at my call, and have speech with me? Aye, eke the fierce cat i' th' wood; did she not bring her young to me and let me fondle them? Even the wild Deer and sly Foxes do lie down by me unafraid. I will not eat of them Master Seneschal."

"In truth I should not entreat thee to eat of a fox or wild cat," said I, "for I trow they would not please thy palate!" And when she noted the wrinkles at corners of mine eyes, she too smiled, and saith, "Have it thine own way, Kellen, yet let me have mine also."

"Thou shalt do as thou wilt in all things, Sweeting," laughed I, "and eat what seemeth to thee good, as do most of us. Hast opened thy mind on this to Father Godwyn?"

"Yea; on one occasion; and he saith with a smack of his lips, how that to reject the good red meat God had sent for his nourishment were a grievous sin in him; and then when I questioned him whence did he know it was so sent, he saith, 'Verily, my stomach hath told me so time and oft,' and bade me hold my peace. Also, stroking my curls, saith an I grew older I would not be content with herbs; whereat quoth I 'My Mother was,' and he turned away and spoke of other things."

. . . . .

And now, Father, though my tongue would willingly further serve recollection, let what thou hast writ suffice, my bosom eased by avowal. Alack! would that I had ta'en counsel with thee after that I shot at the Witch! That I did not so, sore wracketh my mind. God knoweth 'twere shameful

fear of thy chiding made me play the craven. Had I but done otherwise, our sweet Mistress Faie might even now be in full vigour. May the Almighty watch over her now and alway.

Writ atte slowe dictatioun on divers ocasiouns fromme ye lips of Kenelm ye Seneschalle of ye Castel of Pommereine untille abowte ye Seasoun of Lammastide Anno Domini MCCCCLIX.

CHAPTER IV

The Conclusion of the Chronicles of Father Godwyn

THUS as already related entered I upon my Wardship of the Babe, and in sooth great was my joy and solace to watch her as she grew month by month and year by year to lusty childhood under the tender care of the good Kenelm and Jennifer his wife; they devoting themselves to the provision of her bodily needs, whiles that I served her spiritually; instructing her, item, in Holy Writ and imparting such other learning as lay within me, and, item, teaching her to understand the meaning of written Symbols and eke to fashion them for herself. Much did it rejoice me to observe, as she passed from infancy to early maidenhood, the eagerness with which she sought to acquire knowledge.

Demure and gay by turns, bright and lovable was she, thereby reviving memory of her Mother in Heaven whom she resembled in ev'ry feature. Quaint fancies also the child harboured—but doth not Youth ever so?—whereof she spake happily to me of bright winged Beings, who, unseen by others, conversed and gaily sported with her. By the which, at first did I hold the belief that she endowed the Butterflies and other bright-hued flying things with human semblance; yet when she saith to me they addressed her as "child of Sylphiane," I foolishly, and maybe sternly, chid her for too large an imagination, and bade her reject such fantasies. Whereafter she returned not to the matter, but, as now I know, confided in the good Seneschal, who as also I now know, had, tho' simple minded, greater hearted sympathy, and following thereon, a deeper understanding, of the child's Visions. And he hath

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since told me it ever seemed to him that there was that about her not altogether of this world, and not like unto the manner of other children.

In her ways she followed in the footsteps of my Lady; for neither of them would consent to eat of a dish of meat of any slain animal nor feathered bird. Yet did both thrive on fruits and the herbal produce of the earth. Thereat did I wonder, for a haunch of buck, a fat goose, or a barbecued pig did exceeding gratify my carnal palate. Well do I recall that my Lord and I, to please his Lady, oft did make shift to stay our stomachs with the messes of green-food she prepared with her own deft hands; natheless, tasty as they were, yet after partaking thereof, we were fain, to sound of her laughter—part in diversion part in something of pique—to call within the hour for platters of strong meat wherewith to satisfy our grosser appetites.

No Retainer of the household but did not vie in rendering service to our sweet Faie. From Seneschal to Turnspit all were devoted in their devoir. Yet was she not spoiled.

From the lips of Kenelm have I gleaned, and set down in his own words, incidents he hath related to me, and of some of which I was ignorant, in particular that which came to pass on the maid's seventh birthday. Therefore shall I pass to the day when she arrived at the tenth year of her life, when a thing befell, reviving fears theretofore lulled into false securitie by uneventful passage of time.

On morn of that day,—as was my custom unless hindered therefrom by duty to the sick—did I repair to Pommereine bearing with me a gift, to wit, a Missal the cover thereof chastely garnished and the leaves thereof bedecked in rich colouring, with comforting Texts and portrayals of the Apostles, all limned by craftsmen of the City of Excestre, cunning in such matters.

Arrived there and finding Faie in her own little Pleasaunce (planted with her own hands with the gay flowers that she

loved and herself tended) and being thanked with a cry of delight and a kiss from her sweet lips, she lisped, but oh how like her voice unto that of Sylphiane!

"The lovely Lady hath but now departed."

"And what Lady might that be?" I asked with a smile.

"I know not her name and station; she hath before now visited me, and to-day she besought me to go with her and see her Garden hard by; the which she saith is fully stocked with bloom."

"I know of no such garden," quoth I, "nor any Dame such as thou sayest. Tell me of her mien and apparel."

"Oh! of sweet comeliness was she, and hath spoke me fair and in gentle sort, and saith she had well known my Mother and my Father ere they went hence. Richly clothed was she, and with me long time discoursing about her flowers, urging me to go with her and myself behold how much gayer were they than mine own."

"And thy reply?" said I in some bewilderment.

"I said," she answered shyly, "that if the good Father Godwyn would not say me nay, and Kenelm, who also loveth a garden, could accompany me, then would I gladly go with her; and then did I descry thee a little way away, approaching through the woodland, and in joy cried 'Why, here now cometh the Reverend Father!' and lo! as I spake the words —she was not; but only the empty air about me."

Saith I, "Thou hast been asleep and dreaming, little one; there was no such Dame as thou describest."

"Yea, verily was there! Come; I will show thee!" and holding me by the hand and skipping by my side, she drew me to a piece of greensward, "Behold!" saith she, "I sat here and she stood there."

I looked down, and observed that round about where her visitor had been, the grass was trod down, and withered and charred as by fire. Whereat my heart stood still; for I knew it had been one of the Witches in assumed guise, and

praised the Saints that Faie had shown sense and judgment beyond her years, and that I had come upon her when I did.

With searching eye probing the shadows of the trees about and when I could speak without tremor of voice, said I (for I did not desire the child should be affrighted), " Peradventure she purposeth to return. An that happen, hail Kenelm, or one of the serving-maids. Go not with the lady else; the garden of which she spake may be at some distance beyond the strength of thy little feet to attain. Therefore must Kenelm saddle pony for thee and walk alongside."

Then taking her with me into the Keep, I gave her into the care of her Servitors, and straight sought out the Seneschal, and perpended to him on the matter. Also earnestly did I adjure him at no time to let his Mistress lie out of sight of him or of those under him. All of which, heavy of spirit, promised he faithfully to see to the ordering thereof. Moreover, for further security, did he, greatly to the Child's joy and mine own satisfaction, forthwith obtain a great dog to be her constant companion and guard, attaching to his collar a medallion bearing the effigy of Saint Leofric, the which amulet I consecrated with a prayer.

Following thereon, the years contained naught untoward until the Maid's fifteenth birthday; whereon I purposed to mark the day with a token of my love for her, videlicet, a book of the Life of Saint Paul; the clasps thereof wrought in silver. And forasmuch as I desired early to present it, I retired on the Eve early to my couch for rest against my faring forth in the morn thro' the woods. For I was then come to an age to feel weariness more than aforetime, and moved more leisurely than had been my wont.

For the space of maybe two hours I laid me down, but was woken by a clear voice like to that of Sylphiane, beseeching me breathlessly:

" Father! Father! Wake thee! Hie thee on the instant to Pommereine. Speed thy going, Father!"

Faint light of dawn had stolen into my chamber but I could discern no one therein. Yet the insistent voice continued in my ears :

" Father ! . . . to Pommereine ! . . . quickly ! "

Urged thereby I dallied not, but having arisen and flung my cloak about me and taken a stout ash staff in my hand, I set forth in haste, fearing I knew not what ; and all through the wooded paths was the same voice with me saying, in alarm :

" Faster ; faster ; good Father ! Faie sorely needeth thee."

Increasing more and more my pace, in spite of my years and weight ; heedless of brambles staying me, and low branches striking on my brow ; stumbling over the rough places ; panting, I sped on and on until at length I gained the outer Portcullis, where with my breath coming in choking gasps, I hurriedly spake the Sentinel set there for night-guard ;

" Hath anyone passed in this night ? "

" Nay, Father," he replied, noting with amaze my condition, " all is well."

How little he knew, poor fool !

I hastened into the Castle, up the broad stairway, then along the corridor leading to Faie's sleeping-room, my sandal-shod feet giving no sound of my approach, and flinging back the portico curtains, looked in and beheld a sight the which, filling me with horror, shall be for ever imprinted on my brain, as if burnt thereon with a branding-iron.

There were three Hags within the Chamber, whereof one was pinned by the throat by the hound Wolfram, he growling fiercesomely in terrible fashion and shaking her for the vermin she was. My Sweeting lay in her night-clothes on the ground, her neck tightly bound to stifle cry for succour, her limbs a-twitch, feebly struggling the while other two Witches essayed to drag her to the Casement.

Chronicles of Godwyn—Conclusion

My fatigue forgot, I sprang forward and beside myself with rage, raised my cudgel and brought it down with dreadful force upon the Hag nearest unto me, so that it brake in twain, and for the nonce she lay stunned on the rush-strewn floor.

Her remaining companion leapt at me like a wild cat of the woods, clawing at my face and neck with her talons, making to clutch my throat, leaving scars apparent to this day. In doing so, unknown to me, she brast the chain of Sylphiane's Cross so that it fell to the ground.

Then, consumed with fury, I, a Priest, forgat Him Whose servant I was, and sinned gravely in that I, the Apostle of Peace, became the Man of Blood and Fire.

Putting forth all my strength, the which seemed to be renewed in full vigour as of long aforetime, I grasped the Devil-witch by her skinny weasand, and heedless of the hurts she gave me, I squeezed . . . and squeezed . . . and God forgive me ! snarling like unto the Hound . . . I tossed her up as tho' she had been thistle-down and cast her forth from casement-opening into space ; watching with maddened eye, and teeth bared in grim exultation, as she hurtled down and down, and fell crashing on the stone balustrade below ; and then in my frenzy did I snatch from Wolfram the one beneath him and flung her out also ; so that the twain lay together with their backs broke.

For the which acts I afterwards humbled myself in penance for that I had committed them in a moment bereft of saneness. Yet did the Lord comfort me and solace my mind ; implanting therein the conception that tho' my Mission on earth was one of Peace and Goodwill toward Men, those who, abhorrent to Him, served the Devil, were none of my spiritual concern, and that in doing what I did, I did well.

Upon the third assailant, by then essaying to rise, did I, raging, plant my foot, crying in a mighty voice :—" Ho ! without there, Varlets ! To me ! to me ! "

Whereupon came running Kenelm and his wife, roused from unusual depth of slumber, with some half-score men-at-arms and others who dragged the Hell-cat to her feet, holding her tightly. Then did I raise Faie, tenderly laying her on her bed, kneeling by her and bidding those about me straightway to fetch the Leech.

Wolfram with torn and bleeding jowl and flank, whining low and quivering in his mighty limbs—for he was sore hurt—raising his huge body so that his fore-feet rested on her coverings, gently licked her face, and then sighing softly—Peace be upon him for a gallant Hound!—fell back lifeless.

Faie seemed in little better case; and my heart sank. Nevertheless hers beat; and I could discern no sign of maltreatment save slight mark of chafing about her neck. Trembling with weakness from my arduous passage thro' the Forest and the ensuing struggle, I thanked God for his mercies, waiting with my hand on hers, praying as never had I prayed before.

Observing this, the Witch-woman, with slavering mouth and fierce striving to break forth from those who held her, mocked me, screaming in derision and menace;

"Ha! Mumble thy useless prayers, Censer-swinger! Yet give ear to me and heed well the words I speak. For know, of my hate to thee and thy breed, that if Hell shall not have the body of this mongrel spawn of Sprite and Mortal, neither shall Heaven receive her soul . . . nor Life nor Death shall she attain; nor Mass nor Miserere avail her. Prone log lieth she there; henceforth hapless so to lie—aye! long after thy gross carcase hath mouldered in forgotten grave. An this bratling ope her eyesen it shall be but to shed puling tears for that she hovereth, certain only of uncertainty, 'twixt Seen and Unseen. But for yon Hound lying dead, she had been ours. So Sir Priest, importune thy God for a Miracle and to let other Hound aid her hereafter. May that choke thy gullet, tonsured Time-server! For such shall be

her doom; and thus do I swear it, trampling under heel the Cross of Sylphiane which thou prizest!"

Whereupon, looking down, I saw, aghast, as also did those which restrained her, that she spurned 'neath her accursed foot my Sylphiane's Crucifix. Again did hot blood surge within me, and leaving Faie, I sprang to my feet, and clutching by the throat the blasphemous Hag, thrust her violently aside, and bent down and picked up the sacred Symbol, whereon, praise to God, I saw, to my great joy, no sign of break nor any disfigurement.

"Bind this Devil-woman with many strands of stout hempen cord," I commanded, "and in dungeon immure her until that she be taken before the Bishop and Court of Cleriques. Hasten! remove her from my sight this instant, lest I do her some mischief!" Afterwards was I told that scarce could it be believed that it was I who spoke; so transformed was my visage and so terrible the accent of my voice.

While the Men-at-arms obeyed, did Kenelm with downcast mien direct that the body of the faithful dog be removed and given well-merited decent sepulture.

Then did I return to Faie's side. . . .

At length did my beloved charge stir somewhat, seeing me not; but feeling tender grasp of my fingers, her lips trembled into a faint smile as she murmured faintly:

"Dear Father Godwyn, I knew thou wouldst come. Now may I safely sleep."

To my lasting grief, those few words were the last she was heard to utter.

And it passeth my understanding that they should have been spoken to me, Warder who slept; Guardian guarding not; leaving a poor dumb beast, more faithful to his trust than I, to protect her as I lay supine, slumbering the while her wicked assailants drew near and ever nearer to her. Wondrous be the ways of the Lord! Had I but gone to Pommereine overnight. . . . Had I but had my Cross upon me

when the Devil-hag put her curse on the child. . . . Oh vain regret for what might have been!

The maid, as I say, lay there; her smile abiding on her lip. Even so had her Mother lain at the last. . . .

Yet was there this marvellous distinction: that Faie drew breath calmly and easily, with colour mantling in her cheek. But when the Leech came, for all his skill in medicine he could in no wise rouse her. Nor then, nor at any time since, for all these many years. To this day she liveth, yet wrapped in deep slumber.

Learned men, versed in art of tending all ailments which beset our frail bodies, have come and ministered unto her; and gone again. And still she lieth there in warmth of life, her bosom rising and falling; but waketh not.

And what shall her waking be? How if I am not here? Nor any familiar face? My heart turneth to water at the thought, for wake she surely must in God's good time, perchance in a changed and changing World.

I fear not further assaults from the Witches, for our captive (being she who had first assailed me in the Forest) invoking terrible but vain maledictions upon my head, was in due time burnt at the stake in St. Thomas' meadow by the City of Excestre, in penalty for her part in that attempted villainy. As for the rest of her kind, whether it be truth or no, I know not of a certainty; but it was said that for many nights—yea, and not unseldom even by day, after the beginning of Faie's living death, roarings as of wild beasts—deeper than bay of wolves—were heard in the depths of the Pommereine forests, and on the Moor; also pallid and terror-stricken country folk have spoken to me of Dragons seen to be chasing Black Shapes in hurrying flight, now on the ground below, now above the tree-tops, and of fierce snarlings and screams of agony heard. And I bethought me how that the Lady Sylphiane had erstwhile told me those fearsome great Creatures held Fays in great friendship, and took always their part and

fought at their bidding against Witches Warlocks and Vampires. Certes; none of the Hags or their kin, have been observed for long time back for a great distance from Pommereine. Nay more: a worthy Palmer from Caledon, sojourning with me last Fall, hath mentioned that even beyond the border of Scotia such are not now to be seen, nor for years past.

Nay; it be for the Child's lonesomeness when she shall regain wareness, that my Soul is vexed and affrighted; for Kenelm and Jennifer hath this long while gone to their Rest. And I alone am left.

Ere the doughty Seneschal, full of years and honour, had passed away, I took counsel with him and together we with our own hands secretly constructed 'neath the great Tower of Pommereine, a Vault, and she lieth therein on a stone couch, lambs-wool and silken coverlets under and over her; on her hands her Father's and her Mother's rings. Upon the Wall behind her head have we disposed her Father's blade in scabbard, graven with his Sign-manual upon the Silver hilt thereof, for centre of a Trophy whereof the twin flanks are, item, his sheathèd dagger; and item, his hunting-knife. The key to the Chamber hangeth by the head of mine own couch (for I have abandoned my Presbytery and now dwell in the Castle to be nigh at hand if needs be), but its fellow hath been fashioned, and is on a gold chain about her neck; so that if she waketh, she shall find ready to her hand means of egress.

Also in a strong-box bound with iron, and lock thereto cunningly wrought, shall I lay this and other writings anent the matter; to the end that whosoever, on a day yet hidden in the Womb of Time shall discover them, may on perusal have better understanding of her rank and condition. And thereby what hath been set down may stand our Faie in good stead.

To the like end have women-servants, with many tears, bestowed in another coffer sundry apparel and articles of

adornment, ready 'gainst the child's need thereof. Whether foolishly they have so ordered this, God knoweth, and He alone. Time will show.

And there in her living Tomb I must perforce soon leave her, commending her to the Most High. For I have far exceeded the allotted span of Mankind, and seen Kings enthroned and afterwards depart, also war in the land and the House of York succeed the House of Lancaster; and the day cannot now be long distant whereon I myself shall go to join my beloved Avril and Sylphiane 'mid fairer scenes than earth can show, in a Land where there be no partings, and Eternal Life overcometh Death.

In Nomine Patris, Filiique, et Sancti Spiritus.

GODWYN
Priest.

This donne on ye XIX daie of ye monath of Septembre in ye yeare of Owre Lorde MCCCCLXXV.

PART II

A.D. 1935

CHAPTER V

Clement Pomary's Testimony

I'VE told Uncle exactly what Chaps will say if they ever read what I'm going to shove down. But he said me being called a liar wouldn't hurt him; and wasn't he in it too—up to the neck? And possibly even Ananias had his good points. And besides one had only to read the Gup in the Newspapers and the quack advertisements to see that lots of other people wrote romances and got away with it. Well; when he put it like that and added there would be a couple of quid in it for me, if I would write down while it was fresh in my mind, what I knew of this rum affair, I said to myself, why worry?

So I'm having a shot at it, but don't expect any littery fireworks 'cos I can't do 'em. This is going to be a plain yarn of what happened; which at the time pretty well made my hair stand up on end. And don't ask me to explain anything—I can't. And shan't try.

I hope I shall spell everything right as Uncle's sure to vet it when I've done; and he says be careful to puncturate it properly; you know—comas and collons and things. Bother! I'm not strong on them—never know when to put which. However . . .

My name's Pomary. Clement Pomary. Which is why I was called Codlin at school, as one of our fellows who learnt French, or thought he did, said Pomary must have something to do with apples. Thought it funny, I s'pose. However, I don't mind; I'd rather be called that than "Stinker," which they called him because his father is believed to make poison

gas. A brainy bloke, wore specs, and swotted. Used to loose off words like sentryfugel and farids and hidrostatics—but didn't know a racquet from a carpet-beater.

Well, that's who I am.

And Uncle? Well, he's my uncle and a jolly good one. Was on the Somme, and afterwards in India. A gunner. I'd like to show you his Medals. He's a Major and has looked after me ever since Father and Mother died when I was five, and that's ten years ago. Once he was all-round good at games though you wouldn't think it to look at him now, with a gammy left leg through a Sniper getting him against the skyline somewhere in the Khyber Pass. So he doesn't even play Golf, but takes it easy, mostly sitting on a camp-stool and mucking about with a hammer, chipping off bits of rock. Calls himself an arkyologist, or something like that. Arky is right. The arkier it is the better he's pleased. But he's a fine chap, and don't you say anything different,—after you've read this, I mean. A silly ass at school one Prize-giving asked me who was "Old-Dot-and-Go-One" going round with me, but lost interest when he got a black eye to take home with him. If it hadn't been that he was a sort of pal of mine I'd have made the other to match.

Where was I? Oh yes! Uncle. As I said, he's a corker; a bit inclined to be Parade-groundy and eye-boring now and then, and has to be carefully handled when the wind's easterly. But mostly a cheery feller. He and I live in London with Aunt Scratch-poll, his older sister. Well, no, that's not her real name—it's Margaret; Megs for short, but she's a bit of a terror to both of us. Neither he nor she are married, but the way she talks to him sometimes, you'd think she was his wife. And he takes it lying down. Says she's always bossed him more or less all his life and he's got used to it. Still, she has her good points too, she's straight; and if I wipe my boots when I come in, and don't leave things knock-

ing about in the wrong place, or speak with my mouth full, and little piffling things like that, she's part human. And I'll tell you why I say so—she always tips me a quid or two when I go back to school. And with the same old joke every time; telling me it's a thank-offering that the Hols are over. Last time it was only ten bob 'cos I'd spilt some beastly ink over a carpet. And the way she went on! I might have done it on purpose. Said the rest of my tip would be wanted for cleaning it; and it was rough justice, and guff like that. Rough? I should think it was! On me.

However, I've finished School, and I'm going to be coached for Woolwich.

Well, that's enough of the family. Oh no! I was forgetting! There's Boris.

Boris is a Great Dane, and big at that—about the size of a small donkey, but with far more brains and go. He's a stout pal. But Aunt calls him a great hulking brute, and says he takes up a jolly sight too much room in the Flat, and costs as much to feed as it does me, and that's saying a lot. (She likes getting off snacks like that, but I don't think she means them half the time.)

When Uncle's on an arky expedish during the Hols he always takes me and Boris too. Boris minds the car and the sandwiches, while Uncle and I roam round and he chips and scoops bits off the United Kingdom, as happy as a grig—whatever that is. The car is a Steadybucker, a beauty; Uncle drives it himself, and I am learning the innards of it too so that I can do Shuvver now and then. And he says mind I keep my eye on the Scrap-metal market and when I asked him why, he said with a twinkle in his eye, something seemed to tell him I might find it a good thing to do when I got my driving licence and a car of my own. I can't think what he means.

I had a lot more in here, but Uncle says chuck it and get on, so I've cut it out.

The Dryads

Well, we went down to Devonshire, to a little village-place but Uncle says don't mention the name or we shall be overrun with trippers, and stayed at a Pub handy to a sizeable bit of land which Uncle had just bought—acres and acres—with a jolly ruined Tower and other bits of loose old masonry kicking about. He said he'd not be surprised if they weren't what's left of a place which a long time ago was called Pommereine Castle and belonged to his Ancestors. Aunt Scratch said Fiddlesticks because he'd never been able to find out anything about it and didn't know where it stood, if it ever stood at all, so what had he to go on? And no reference to it in any records, and even old maps only said "ruins of a Belvedere." And probably the whole thing legendary. However now that Unk's got it, he means to build a house round what's left of the tall part, to live in. Aunt said she'd miss the shops in town but I'm all for it myself. Give me Country all the time. There's a trout stream not far away. And some shooting. And he says he's going to buy me a rod and gun. I tell you, that's the sort of Uncle to have. The ruins are miles away from anywhere—no other houses or cottages near—and said to be haunted. The local yokals give them a wide birth; the only ones who go there being kids blackberrying. And those not often.

Boris and I thoroughly explored the whole shoot; and I did wish I could climb up to the top of the Tower, but most of it's internals are gone and it's open to the sky, and heaps and heaps of dead leaves inside and out. When I asked Boris if he could see any way up, he looked at it and shook himself and put his tongue out—meaning he was blessed if he could. There are some tallish fir and other trees which have grown up about it but they're not near enough to be of any use, or perhaps I could have shinned up and reached the top of it that way, I mean along the branches.

Boris now; this was the first time he had been down to the land and I wondered what was the matter with him. In

London he's rather on his dignity. Specially if we leave him in the Car. In Devon he seemed to go Native, and would always be roaming round that Tower. Kept scratching at the earth and whining, mostly at the root of one of the trees alongside it, but now and then at a mound of leaves between it and the walls. I told Uncle about it, and he said something about Rabbit-holes. Rabbit-holes! Can you see a Great Dane bothering himself about things like that? Terriers, yes! But not a big chap like Boris. Besides there isn't a hedge just there.

Well, the first Sunday night in June while we were staying at the Pub, there was a hefty thunderstorm and no end of a gale; and slates were ripped off and chimney-pots toppled down all over the village. The next day we three went to "the Estate", as Uncle calls it, to see if any damage was done there. There was. One of the trees by the Tower had been struck and shattered to smithereens, and another close by had been blown clean over and was lying with its roots sticking up in the air. It had pulled up a lot of the soil too, and displaced a frightful lot of dead leaves. Uncle had gone off somewhere with his hammer, and I went close up to look at it, with Boris who seemed to go clean off his rocker and began scratching at a queer-looking sort of cavety which one of the roots had torn itself out of.

I said "What is it, old man?" But he took no notice except to whine and go on scratching with all four legs at once and he flicked a pebble or a bit of earth or something, bang into my eye, which stung like blazes. When it stopped watering I saw he was still at it and that he was busy with what looked like a shallow stone step and another beginning to show lower down under soil and leaves mixed. I yelled to Uncle to come and look, and he got quite worked up and said he thought they might lead to some underground passage. I got a bit excited too.

The Hound stuck to his job, every now and then sniffing

hard and prancing up to us and barking, and then back again to the works.

Now, among the gadgets which Uncle takes about with him when he goes arking is what I call a spade, but he says it's a trenching-tool. So he sent me to get it from the car which we'd left parked on a rough track about two hundred yards away. I got it, tootled it along, and then we took turns to clear those steps. And the moment we started to do that, Boris sat on his haunches, panting and watching us, as much as to say he'd done his bit and it was up to us to get on with it.

It was pretty hard work, as we were hampered a bit by the tree roots, but we uncovered four narrow steps, and then I'm blowed if we didn't come to what looked like an old door sunk below the ground, with heavy iron clamps, in the base of the Tower. The wood had rotted a bit at the bottom but it still seemed pretty tough higher up. Boris then got more excited than ever and while we were scraping it clear of soil and a heap of leaves going back to the year Dot, though there was only room on the stairway for one at a time, he would keep on shoving in and getting in the light. And the way he yowled and went on!

We were all three intent on the job but Uncle and I began to ache a bit about the back so we knocked off and had a go at the sandwiches. The hound generally hangs round when we do that, waiting in hope, but to-day he wouldn't come away from those steps even when we called him, but stopped there wuffing and snuffling by turns at that door. Uncle said it was uncanny, which reminded me about what people said about ghosts being there. After we'd wolfed our lunch, we set to work again and at last were able to sound the "all clear." The door was a lowish one, not more than five foot high I should think, opening inwards, with a keyhole in it.

So now what?

We tried to push it but it wouldn't budge. Then Uncle

told me to fetch the jack from the car. Bother! Another journey for me! and the sun scorching hot, too. Well, I got it and gave it him, and he gave three or four hefty smites with it—he's pretty strong in his shoulders and arms—and bust a hinge and the door fell in a little, Boris gave a sudden wild howl which made us both jump, and flung himself at the slanty opening and squeezed through, barking like blazes.

And then, 'pon my Sam! I felt prickly all over and nearly started to bunk, and Uncle stood with his mouth wide open goggling at me. And I goggled back. For we heard a kid's voice calling out,

"How now, Wolf! Dear Wolf! And yet thou'rt not Wolf, brave hound. To whom belong'st thou?"

And we could hear Boris grunting and snuffling like he does when we rub his ears and he's pleased.

"Good Lord!" stammered Uncle, "there's someone there! There must be another way in!" And he limped round the Tower to see. I followed, and we went right round, and inside too, but the ground was quite solid everywhere and covered with a thick carpet of leaves from last autumn, and a good many before that, and brush-wood.

So we came back to the steps, and heard the little voice say,

"Fetch me hither the Father or Jennifer, good hound!"

Uncle went as white as a sheet and looked as if he was seeing things, and he took up the jack again and had another go at the door, and at last it gave way a bit more and swung inwards, hanging by one hinge. I pushed in, Uncle following, and as there was precious little light, I turned on my flash-lamp, which sometimes works and sometimes doesn't. And what did we see? You'd never guess.

Inside the door there were three more steps leading downwards into a lowish room, I should say about fifteen feet by ten. (I stepped it afterwards.) The walls and ceiling were stone and at one end some sort of a bed, and sitting up on it

with her arm round Boris's neck fondling his ears, we saw a yellow-haired little girl!

Boris gave a welcoming bark or two, as if to say, "Here you are at last," and then licked her hand, while she said to us, quite coolly, as if earthquakes meant nothing in her young life,

"Who may ye be who enter, breaking in so roughly?"

Uncle simply stared at her, dumb as a brick, his eyes the size of saucers, so I butted in;

"Who are you, and how did you get in here?"

She looked at me and smiled, and replied,

"I am of a truth Faie, daughter of Sir Avril and Sylphiane his wife. Who art thou, fair youth?"

"I'm Clement," said I.

"Did I hear aright? Did'st say Kellen?"

"No," I replied, "Clement—Clem. for short. My other name's Pomary."

"Pomaray? Pomaray?" she repeated once or twice, each syllable separately. "Art thou then of my Kindred? And who withal may be the aged man with thee, halt in left leg as be Kellen?"

"Who's an aged man?" burst out Uncle. "I'm only fifty-five! But never mind that. What beats me is why ON EARTH you are in here alive and not suffocated?"

The girl turned to me, saying, "Words to me unknown flow from him; what manner of speech be this?"

"Come to that," I said, "yours is pretty rum. Where did you pick it up? And this is my Uncle, the Major, and his name's Pomary, too. He isn't aged. But he's a bit lame and er . . . er . . . just now he's upset—so'm I,—at finding you here."

"He hath rude diction but a kindly eye withal."

"He ain't a bit rude really, but he wants to know, and so do I, where you come from and what you're doing in this vault place?"

"I know not why I be here for it be not my sleeping room, wherein I lay when the Witches did seize me as I were a-bed."

"Witches? Which Witches?" said I, rather fogged. "No Witches here."

"Nay, because Wolf sprang at them and Father Godwyn came," she answered. "Pray you bring him hither, good youth, I would see him, and Kellen; aye, and Jennifer. Where be they?"

"Look here," I said, "I don't know what you're talking about. There's nobody here but us three. You said you had a Father and Mother. Where are they? Where do they live?"

"They be indeed in Heaven," said she softly; "from the time I first drew breath."

"Oh!" said I, "mine are dead too."

"Nay, not dead," she said, "there is no Death; they abide, as do also mine, with God and his Angels."

Since Uncle had had his little peeve about his age, he had listened without saying a word. At that moment I caught his eye and he tapped his forehead. I knew what he meant.

"I don't think so," I said. "Anyway, it doesn't explain why she was bottled up alive in here and no way out till we smashed our way in; does it, Uncle?"

"No, there's that of course," he mused. "What *does* it all mean? I wish your Aunt was here. And what are we going to do about it?"

"Find her people I suppose." Then I turned back to her. "I say, where do you live?"

"Live?" she answered, passing her hand over her forehead and tossing back her curls, "why here, forsooth. In mine own habitation. This be verily my Keep of Pommereine."

"Pommereine!" yelped Uncle; "I knew it! I knew it! I said so all along!"

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"But," said I, "there's no Keep here, only ruins and an old Tower thing—we're under it now. I s'pose you came in somehow and went to sleep, didn't you? Why, you've got a key on that thin chain round your neck. Is it the key of the door?"

"Nay! have I not said I know not how came I hither? And this chain and key be strangers to me," she said, unhitching 'em and looking at both wonderingly before passing 'em to me. "Jennifer may wot of them. I would she were fetched."

"I tell you, there's nobody called Jennifer or any such name here. Only us. Got any brothers or sisters?"

"Nay, yet am I well acquaint with two of my Mother's sisters, Violas and Floreal, who, I ween, were but now with me, but on thy entry they left me."

I couldn't make anything of this, for I knew jolly well no one had been there but we three,—or four, if you count Boris. "How old are you?" I enquired.

"Yestermorn—nay, was it yestermorn?—the sun had risen on the fifteenth year of my life. Of what age art thou?"

"The same," I replied—and we smiled at each other, matey-like.

While I was thinking what to say next, Uncle, who had been muttering to himself and sort of dazedly nosing round tapping the walls and rumpling his hair with his fingers, hit his gammy leg against something on the floor, and made a remark. Very emphatic it was. I knew what he meant to say, only he turned it into "Dash," and he put so much pep in the "ash" it sounded like a soda water syphon going off.

"What's up, Uncle?" I asked.

"I don't know, but there's something down here . . . feels like a . . . yes . . . it is; it's a box of sorts," and he picked something off the ground. It looked as if it was made of wood, about twelve inches or so square, rather shallow with iron clamps on it. As Uncle turned it about in

his hands, blowed if the whole caboodle didn't go phut. Rotten, I s'pose; anyway, it dropped in a shower of scrap-iron, splinters, and dust, and in among it some bits of stuff with writing on.

"Parchments!" gasped Uncle when he stopped sneezing, as he picked them up and scanned them; and just then my torch struck work.

He's a blood at anything antique; you should see some of the junk he's picked up at odd times, and croons over it now and then. Old pictures. Old china. Old books. Yes, and he's lectured on them too at the Society's Hall.

"Parchments!" he repeated thoughtfully fingering them. "And pretty old ones too; let's take them into the light." And he went out with them.

Then for some reason my torch, which I had been pressing every now and then, as one does when these things stop working and one hopes for the best, shone out again. The little girl smiled at me and I grinned back.

"Do you know about those paper things?" I asked.

"I know naught," she answered. "They be none of mine, nor have I before set eyes on the coffer wherein they lay."

At that moment I saw another box, like the other one, only a bit larger; it wasn't locked, only hasped. I threw back the lid and saw it had toggery of some sort inside, smelling like rose-leaves. I picked off the top things and held them up, with the beam of the flash-lamp on them. They were as light as a feather.

"My Sabbath-day farthingale and kirtle!" whooped the girl, reaching out for them.

"Oh, you know about them then?" said I, handing them to her.

"Verily, are they not mine own?" Then she threw back the bedclothes and counterpane and swung herself off the alter and sat sideways, turning them this way and that—and

as she did so, I saw something glittery and I noticed that on one hand she had a diamond ring, and on the other a heavy gold one with something engraved on it. And I also saw she had only a thin nightgown on, her white skin showing through.

"Here!" I said, "you're not dressed."

"Forsooth I be not attired! Why should I be, inasmuch as I were abed when the Evil Women assailed me?" Then she bent down and rootled in the box; "and here be other raiment of mine! How came it hither?"

Then I heard Uncle calling out excitedly, "Clem! Clem! come here! Quick!"

So I beetled out through the doorway, and there he was, sitting on the top step.

Said he, "Clem; this is the most extraordinary find! This stuff must be worth all I paid for the land, and more! I can't read some of it—the skins have shrunk and the writing's faded here and there, but as near as I can make out they're hundreds of years old and all about Pommereine! 'Legendary and traditional,' your Aunt said. These will shew her! What a perfectly gorgeous discovery! And *what* a stir these will make at the Society's next Meeting!" he ended cockily.

"Have they anything to do with the girl in there?" I asked. "If they have, mustn't they belong to her?"

"M' yes . . . yes; if they have I suppose they do," he said, as his face fell. I think for the moment he'd forgotten all about her. Then he bucked up, saying "But how could these ancient things have anything to do with a child of that age? Didn't I hear her say she was only fifteen?"

"Yes," I answered, "and did you know she'd only a nightgown on? Well, she has, and I found a box with togs in, which she said were hers."

"Another box? Let's have a look at it," said he, and

limped in a hurry down the steps, and was just going in when she spoke—thinking it was me.

"Enter not awhile, Clement, for I am about clothing myself; and it is not seemly, Jennifer saith, that my body be exposed, tho' I trow not wherefore, for I be not misshapen."

"Sorry," mumbled Uncle, and came upstairs again, looking very pink about the gills. Then he glued his nose to the Parchment things again, murmuring bits to himself in an undertone; and every now and then I heard the words, 'Seigneur', 'Seneschal', 'Pommereine', and 'Faie'. He took no notice of me—I might just as well not have been on the map at all. He's like that when he gets arkified.

At last he looked up, muttering in a hushed tone, "Oh, it can't be—it can't be, this is no age of miracles." And then seemed to realise I was still alive, and fixing me with his eye, went on:

"This is the most wonderful thing that ever happened to me, or I should think to anyone else. I find it difficult to realise it at all. Here's a young girl calling herself 'Faie' hermetikly sealed up—couldn't get out till we broke in—and apparently in the best of health and spirits. And, mind you, her face and hands as clean as if she'd washed this morning!"—I hadn't noticed that—"talks in early English style, and now, here's these bits of writing mentioning 'Pommereine' and 'Faie' over and over again. Also other names she mentioned are in 'em too." Then his voice sort of trailed away and he buried himself in the writing again, until he woke up and said, helplessly, "I suppose we *are* here, aren't we? Not dreaming?"

"Well, Uncle," I said, "It's a rum go, but we're here all right. Still, apart from those things you are so wrapped up in, something has got to be done about her."

"Yes, but what? But nobody's going to make me believe . . ." and then he paused, the clockwork having run down again.

"Nobody's going to make you believe what?" I asked.

"Oh, never mind. It sounds too wild. But you're right. We must look after this child until we find her people. Question is, how are we going to set about it? The crowd at the hotel will think it queer if we turn up with this girl all of a sudden."

"I don't see why, Uncle; why not say she's a friend of ours come to stay for a few days?"

Then I said, "Oh Uncle, listen!" for I heard a frightened cry come from within the Vault, "Oh woe! woe! my raiment hath turned to dust and eke my night-garment, the bedding whereon I lay also; alack! for naught have I wherewith to cover myself, save only my leathern sandals!" And a sound of sobbing; and Boris sneezing like anything.

"That's rum!" I said, "there was a box full of stuff . . ." and was going down the steps when Uncle grabbed me.

"You stop here," he said quick, and went to the doorway and poked his head round and then came up again, coughing and looking worried. "I could just see her, crouching between the bed-thing and the wall; she's nothing on, and the place is full of dust . . . !"

"And now what?" I asked.

"Goodness knows!" he replied; "what a ghastly situation!" and he pondered. "I know! Hike up to the Car and get the rug and driving-apron; quick now!" and as I bunked off I heard him call out "All right, my dear; don't cry; don't be frightened! be patient and wait a while."

So for the third time, I chased myself to the Car, and fished out the rug—a lightish brown one—and the apron, which had a strap to go round the waist, and galoped back through the heather and bracken; tripping over the rug twice and near as a toucher coming a frightful purler. And I fancy that must have been when I lost the key and chain. Uncle was still outside the door crooning to the child and telling her to buck up, and there was nothing to make a song about. He

took the things from me and whistled to the Hound, who trotted out and Uncle gave him the rug first, which Boris took in his jaws and went down the steps trailing the end of it behind him; then back again for the apron, Uncle calling out to her, "Here be coverings for the nonce; endue thyself as best thou canst therein!"

"That lingo seems to be catching," I remarked, "you've got it badly."

"Not at all; I've got it jolly well," he answered, "she will understand better if I talk like that."

After a while we heard her say, "I am in a manner bedight, but in sooth the apparel be not easy to dispose about me."

"Heed not that," cried Unk; "we'll do better anon."

Then she came slowly and shyly to the door, and My Hat! she did look a sight! With the apron slung from her neck by the buckled strap, and holding the rug close round herself.

"Behold me!" said she, trying to smile, poor kid; "I'faith the dust be thick upon me and in mine hair, and tickleth my nose. But oh wherefore did my raiment so evanish? It disturbeth me!"

"I will perpend unto thee anon the wherefore thereof; have thou patience, I prithee," gulped Uncle.

Pretty good for him wasn't it? and without practice too!

Then I jogged his arm and pointed; "D'you see? a diamond ring on one hand, and a gold one on t'other?"

"Has she?" and he went down to where she stood in the doorway; "Clem says you wear rings; may I look at them?"

"Verily!" and held up her left hand.

"Very nice; and where did you get that?"

"'Twas my dear Mother's," she replied, "given to the Father Godwyn in trust for me by my Father after that she had Passed Hence."

"Very pretty indeed; and what is the other one like?"

"Mine own Father's," she said simply, drawing it off and

handing it to him. Uncle gave a look at it; rubbed his eyes; gave another look and (I'd never seen him so agitated), "Merciful Heaven!" he cried with his hand to his forehead, and looked round wildly; then, after another peer at it, "Merciful Heaven!" again, and stumbled up the steps as if Old Nick were after him, and collapsed against the tree-roots.

"Now what?" I asked, taken aback.

"Why, Clem, don't you see?" he gasped in a shaky voice, "our own coat-of-arms!"

So I went down and peeked at it. I don't know much about heruldry myself, and I'd only seen our crest; but there it was, roughly engraved over a shield thing. Uncle said in a broken voice, "Of all to-day's mysteries, this is the most shattering; I can't stand much more."

Faie, who had been regarding him with as much surprise as I did, reached up for the ring and put it back on her finger, as he sat down and buried his face in his hands. So to give him time to recover, for he seemed all in, I talked to her. "Leave him alone for a while. Listen; we were just now speaking about you; and wondering if you would like to come with us for a time while we find your friends."

"Cometh this Hound also?"

"Rather!" I said, "he always goes where we go; his name's Boris."

"Boris," she repeated two or three times, to get the hang of it, and then, "So that we truly fare forth to seek my Seneschal and the worthy Father, Yea! and again Yea! But not of a surety in this apparel so unusual?"

"No," interrupted Uncle, rousing himself. "Let me be a moment. Let me think," and dropped his head on his hands again. In a minute or so he turned to me, and he sounded quite tired, "I wish you could drive the car; however, you can't. So I must. You and Boris stay here; I'm going to the Hotel."

"To get some gear for her?"

"Yes," he answered. "Yours. Your hiking shorts. And sweater. It's the only way. Lucky you're no bigger than you are."

"You going to dress her up like that?"

"Bet your sweet life I am," he burst out—quite peevishly for him. "What else is there for it? You've no other clothes here. If you think I'm going to walk into a Hotel chock-a-block full of people, with her as she is now, try again."

"Oh all right, Uncle," said I, rather surprised at his tone, but rearlizing he was feeling properly up against it.

Then off he hobbled, with uncertain step, and talking to himself, thoroughly upset, and Faie, looking like an untidy brown paper parcel, sat on the bottom step with Boris, talking mostly to him and now and then to me. I found she understood me a jolly sight better than I her.

In less than no time, Unk was staggering back again with my suit-case which he handed to her, snapping back the catches. "Hark-ye, Maiden," he said gently (and I bet he'd rehearsed this piece on the way), "we have at hand no raiment such as women wear, but here be garments of Clement; to serve for the nonce till others more befitting can be come by."

Listen to that! Uncle first, Shakespeare nowhere!

Faie's eyes lighted up and she smiled at him gravely, murmuring something I didn't catch, the rug nearly slipping off as she reached out for the case.

While she was changing, Uncle went into the Tower and round it about umpteen times looking at the ground, after which we strolled about under the trees, and I tried to be chatty about any ordinary old thing, but Uncle seemed to be wrapped in thought and only grunted "Humph" now and then, and I could see he wasn't listening, so I dried up. Then Faie called to us from the bottom of the steps; "I be now clothed!" And she was. I must say she looked rip-

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ping. What happened next was, she trotted up the steps, lugging the suit-case in which she had stowed the rug, etc., but when she got to the top and put it down she looked round rather dazedly; then clapped her hand to her forehead, and squeaked; "My Tower! My Tower of Pommereine! 'Tis in woful state! And where be the rest thereof? For lo!" she went on with her voice getting higher and higher, "here stood the Portcullis; there the Barbican; and there my Pleasaunce! There is now naught of them. Oh! What hath befallen? Hath the wrath of God descended upon it?" And burst into tears.

And do you know—Uncle, pulling himself together and forgetting all about his being taken to be Methuseler's younger brother, and dismissing for the moment the bothering question of the ring from his mind, went to her, speaking very kindly, and put his arm round her, soothing her and mopping her eyes gently with his own handkerchief, just like a Nurse with a kid. Couldn't have believed it if I hadn't seen it! By degrees she calmed down and tried to smile at him.

"Feeling better now?" he asked, smiling back at her but with his lips trembling.

Well, if she didn't understand what he said, she understood the smile and the petting, nodded, and took his hand and kissed it, and then put her hand through his arm, but still looking as scared as if she'd seen a Ghost.

I felt it was up to me to do something for her too.

"Are you hungry?" asked I; and wished we hadn't eaten all the sandwiches. Then I remembered I had a penny slab of chocolate in my pocket, got out of an automatic machine that morning, so I fished it out—it was a bit on the sticky side with the heat—and broke it and nudging her arm offered her a piece. She withdrew her bewildered gaze from the ruins to cock her eye at it, and asked doubtfully,

"What may this be?"

"Good to eat," I replied; "have a bit?"

"It is not flesh of fowl or kine?" asked she, with a wrinkle showing on her forehead.

"No fear; it's chocolate.

"Choklet?" she said. "I trow I know not the name; nor of what it be composed."

"Well, you will soon. Made from beans. Do try it."

She looked at Uncle enquiringly, who nodded.

Then she took a small bit, looked at it suspiciously, then at us again, and with a little hesitation, shoved it in her mouth; and after a second or two, said "It hath indeed a good savour and 'tis well pleasing to the palate. Hast more to spare?" And ate the lot! All the time admiring the bright cover and bit of tin-foil it had been wrapped in.

And somehow it seemed to me—and Uncle said the same thing—it seemed to make things less eerie to see her champing the choc same as we might do. In fact he said it was that saved him from having a stroke of some sort.

Well; there we were with the Kid landed on us, in my clobber—a trifle on the large side for her, and only sandals on her trotters—shaking the dust out of her long hair and then twisting my broad-brimmed hat in her hands, eyeing it uncertainly. "Aren't you going to put it on?" I asked, and her answer was that Father Godwyn had always said her hair needed no covering, for its richness testified to the glory of God. I don't think Uncle had noticed it particularly, but on that he said yes her hair was too pretty to hide but that in Cities and haunts of mankind 'twere usual to wear head-covering, she replying that to pleasure him would pleasure her; and clapped it on her curls, observing she hoped Father Godwyn would not chide her therefor. As to her feet, she explained she had not been wont to encase them in shoon, for they galled her exceedingly, breaking off to "marvel why her sandals had not turned to dust also."

After this we hiked off in the Car to the only shop in the village likely to sell frocks even of the fashion of the year before

last, for Uncle said she must have something to put over the sweater and shorts; and a coat to travel in, for we should probably be taking her to London. Not by car; by train, which was quicker, for he wanted to see Aunt Scratch as soon as poss.

When we entered the local Stores, customers and staff sort of lined up to see the procession pass; and the Shop-walker, who looked as if he had a secret sorrow, ran his eye over Faie, with his mouth open, like a cod with addernoids. I'm not surprized he was surprized for she was certainly a bit striking to look at. Uncle developed an artful streak which I didn't know was in him, and started off bold as brass, with "This young lady's luggage has gone astray—I want a dress for her, and a coat to go over it."

"Certainly, Sir," said the feller who was looking sort of fassinated at her Sandals, "please to come this way" and began to lead us further up the shop, when Faie went "Ooh!" and then "Ooh!" again, pointing like a Setter at a lot of filmy looking things hanging on brass rails. "Crape der sheen"; the shop-girl said invitingly, leaning well forward over the counter, hoping to do a deal; Uncle trying to look three ways at once.

"Lo!" squeaked Faie in her clear voice which seemed to echo right round the Village, "what pleasing garments be these? How marvellous the texture! 'Tis like unto the raiment of the Child-women! And how cunningly woven! Meseems they would well become the wearer." And going right up in the air with excitement she grabbed one and unfolded it against herself, to see the effect, adding admiringly "never have I seen the like!" And the shop-girl, choking back a titter at Uncle's face, leaned still further over with "would Modom like to see a selection?" and began to pull 'em out in chunks. "No!" shouted Uncle with his face like a beetroot, "she wouldn't! s'mother time; s'mother time," and grabbed Faie's arm, stuttering "Come along,

"I broke it and . . . offered her a piece."
The Dryads

GOVT. G.R.'S COLLEGE
SRINAGA
ACC. NO .....

come along, better ones further on!" So, rather reluctantly, she put it—them—back on the Counter; and Uncle, mopping his forehead, and I, feeling rather a fool too, pushed along.

I hate new clothes myself; one can knock about so much better in old ones; but Faie was different, and spread herself a bit. She might have been a grown woman, the way she fingered this and tried on that, putting frocks over her head just as if she jolly well knew how. She was shown a long mirror, on castors, and after going round to the back of it to see if there was another kid behind it, took a good look at herself in it. In the end we snaffled a cotton rig-out, with pink dandylions on it, and she wore it over mine, and it wasn't so bad. Then Uncle rearlized my Scout lid didn't go too well with it and we went after hats; and had no end of a job to steer her away from a Widow's cap with white weepers, which she rather hankered after, pointing out that it was "of grace and dignity and moreover would well accompany her new outer covering, being ebon in hue." And was "certain Father Godwyn would approve it." Uncle, who ever since we'd found her, looked like a question mark in trousers, and wasn't enjoying himself much, and had heard enough about him, muttered "Blow the Padre" under his breath. However in the end she chose a felt one at twelve and eleven pence three farthings, with a bit of blue ribbon round it and a shiny blob in front, or back, according to how you wore it. It didn't seem to matter which.

And I must say she looked topping. All except about the feet where the effect was rather incongerus. Have I spelt that right?

Now I've never written such a long screed in my life. Praise the Pigs it's done! Still I think I've done pretty well, and earned that two quid. But of course Uncle, who will carry on, will do a jolly sight better than me.

GOVT. GIRLS COLLEGE
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CHAPTER VI

What Major Pomary Had to Say

I HAVE read Clem's effusion and although he has made a few mistakes in spelling—due I think more to carelessness or excitement than to ignorance—I find it more accurate than I expected and I've not altered it much. But he's rather overdone it when he says I resented being called elderly; I didn't mind it in the least, and I don't remember saying much about it. Besides, what's fifty-five anyway! However, he may be right; I was rather agitated at the time, for though I've seen some pretty queer things done by Natives in the Hills (with mango-trees, ropes, and such-like) which I'd always considered no more than clever illusions, I'd never come across, or been mixed up in, anything quite so supernatural and fantastic as our extraordinary adventure. The fact that it took place on my own recently acquired property and which was originally a family possession, seemed to make it even more odd and mysterious. Coming on the top of the digging, which had rather taken it out of me, the whole affair of Faie's discovery suggested a species of re-incarnation, and was—and is—so utterly inexplicable judged by ordinary standards of reasoning, that I was not feeling myself at all. I don't know why one thing more than another should have impressed my mind that bewildering morning; but the realization that she wore on her finger a ring engraved with the arms of my own family, positively staggered me. For what could she be but a relation! True, our names differed slightly, but this was easily accounted for by distortion during the passage of years.

Anyhow, here on our hands was this extremely attractive and well-mannered child, to whom I took from the first. It was clear that she came of good stock, and had all that poise which tells of gentle breeding. Even seeing Pommereine in ruins only shook her momentarily. And for another instance; it being unthinkable to leave her where we had found her, I decided she must first go with us to the hotel; and on the way and even afterwards, while gravely taking everything in, instead of gaping or chattering and asking why this and why that as many children would, she never turned a hair at anything she saw; although those things which to us are everyday and ordinary and taken for granted, must one after the other have been astounding, and even frightening, for her. This did not occur to me at the time, but thinking it over afterwards, and trying to put myself in her place, I was filled with admiration for her self-possession. Why, even the car, which she called a chariot, with its throbbing engine, and the (to her) amazing speed with which by invisible agency it covered the ground, seemed to leave her unmoved, except that as we started she gasped and gently slipped her hand over my arm. When afterwards I questioned her whether her feelings on first introduction to that modern method of progression had not been akin to timidity, she replied proudly, "My father would not have harboured fear, and am I not his daughter?" Besides, she added, just then she was always expecting that the Priest, or her one-time Seneschal, both of whom she thought so much of, might materialize round the next corner, a hope to which she desperately clung.

Clement in his brief and slightly disconnected narrative has told you of our shopping expedition so I will carry on from there.

Arrived at the hotel, the first thing I did was to try and book a room for her for the night; but to my dismay the place was full up and there wasn't one to be had. The people were very nice about it and even offered to find quarters

elsewhere for my " Niece who had come to spend a few days " ; but when I put this suggestion to her, she rather wilted at the prospect, and the corners of her mouth went down, as she said with quivering lip " she was fain to remain " the night with Boris and near us. She had taken an enormous fancy to my Great Dane ; while he was perfectly absurd about her, restless and whining if she went out of his sight. They were inseparable from the beginning.

It was awkward that she had no wardrobe—all she had was what she stood up in—and I had had enough of feminine shopping. But whether she slept in the hotel or out of it, it was necessary that she have night-gear (her own having dissolved in the Vault) and I hadn't sufficient nerve to enter into elaborate explanations with the object of borrowing something from the chambermaids.

In the circumstances, I thought the best and only thing to do for the time being was to clear out and instead of waiting till next day, to go straight to Town to my flat, where I could turn her over to my very capable sister. So despatching a wire to the latter to say we were coming " with a visitor " and, to quote my slangy nephew, " kidding " Faie we were going to find her friends, we made hurried preparations and just managed to catch a night train to London. I had borrowed a rug and a pillow from the hotel, and by tipping up the arms along one side of the compartment I made the child fairly comfortable. Anyway, she dozed peacefully, with Boris at her feet, until about 4 a.m. when we were practically running into Paddington, when with a yawn she sat up, looked round wonderingly and, seeing us, smiled, looking in spite of her creased skirt as fresh as a daisy.

I wasn't feeling a bit like that, for all the way up, the lighting being pretty good, and thanks to my having had previous acquaintance with and experience of ancient writing, I had been able to read and re-read and pore over the parchments, here and there not easily decipherable. But I got the

hang of them, and it seemed to me, amazing as it was, the golden-haired child sleeping opposite me could be no other than the same Faie as was referred to by the Priest and Seneschal.

Yet how could it be possible? According to Father Godwyn, in 1475 she had already slept for over twenty years. Was I to accept, in full belief, the fact that her trance-like state had endured for centuries more? Was I to accept her as a visitant from the Dark Ages? Nay more, as kin to myself? If not; what was the explanation of my crest on the ring described by the Priest? And in further proof of her identity, there was the diamond one of which he also wrote, sparkling on her finger with every slight movement. A stupendous and stupefying situation to face! Was it surprising that my heart beat rapidly and I felt Reason tottering on her throne?

I know a little about mummies of the dead, preserved through thousands of years; but this elfin child was so obviously full of life and youth. Equally strange and unaccountable that in so restricted a space as the vault with all outer air excluded for an unknown period of time, breath of life had remained in her body till now. Dwelling on it all, my brain seemed to go quite muzzy; I felt almost suffocated; and I had to cease musing on the affair—the implications of the position were too tremendous to grasp, and my mind seemed about as active as a blanc-mange. For the present I tried to shut my eyes to contemplations benumbing to the senses. It was a positive relief to hear Clement snoring in his corner!

We taxied to the flat, only to find my telegram on the hall table, unopened, because Maggie, as it turned out, had suddenly taken it into her head to go away somewhere for a few days, and was not expected back till late the next evening.

My nephew rallied round with a suit of his pyjamas and we ushered Faie into the spare bedroom, and there we left her,

with Boris for company, telling her to go to sleep again till we thumped at her door about nine o'clock. But when we called her she explained that she had been used to getting up every morning at 5 a.m. At which Clement ejaculated Gosh! —he being first cousin to a Dormouse and occasionally requiring the application of a wet sponge before he could be induced to get out of bed.

Scrivens, our house-maid, somewhat on the hard-featured side but of sterling character, who has been with us years and years and knows every member of our family and relations and my old Service friends, was utterly obfuscated when she saw the addition to our party, and heard my rather laboured explanation that she was a Miss Pommereine, a distant cousin we had come across in Devonshire—a neat way of putting it I think, for if five hundred years or so isn't distant, I should like to be told what is—who would be "company for Master Clement." Whether she swallowed this I can't say; but her face was a study when Faie in her silvery voice piped with a smile "Give you good morrow, Serving-wench." And on being asked did she know where Jennifer was, Scrivens gave a first-class representation of a stuffed frog.

At breakfast we always have porridge. Faie, when her plate was put before her, exclaimed in delight, "Oh, the good oaten meal!" adding "Many's the time and oft that I have derived enjoyment therefrom!" at which remark I avoided Scrivens' bulging eye. Then Faie, having crossed herself, bowed her head on her hands and in a low voice said grace, and what's more, in Latin. Clem and I looked rather confusedly at each other: it was in the nature of an unconscious reproach to us, for I'm afraid we had got slack about such things.

A couple of spoonfuls of porridge sufficed her. Sausages and bacon she left severely alone, observing she was unaccustomed to partake of anything that had had life, and preferred green foods; which made it plain to me that we should

have to revise our menu; I'm no vegetarian myself, nor are Maggie nor Clem. However, she had a thin slice of bread and honey and a cup of milk; afterwards Returning Thanks—again in Latin. Scrivens being in the room at the time, I saw her eye soften, she being a Catholic, and from that moment she was pro-Faie, and would do anything for her. But then the child had the power of endearing herself to all who came in contact with her.

Now, wishing to keep her thoughts happily engaged until Maggie returned next evening,—and perhaps, if truth be told, to keep my own from dwelling on the problem presented to me—I decided to take the youngsters into Kensington Gardens. So she put on the frock and hat, and in her sandals and the sombre and far from summery-looking coat for such a brilliant day, she and we set forth with Boris.

The outcome of this excursion was to throw an illumination on the workings of Faie's mind, especially in the direction of dumb things. I prefer to keep out of the limelight myself, hating scenes, but I was projected into two successive ones almost immediately.

The first took place in one of those streets running up to Kensington Gore. Close to the kerb stood one of those perambulating costers' carts piled up with boxes and sacks and junk of all sorts; and between the shafts was a rather pathetic looking grey pony. Owing to the heavy load and the uphill rise the poor beast had jibbed, and its driver, an unhealthy looking larrikin, was employing rough language and rougher methods with a whipstock, to induce the animal to move on. I am afraid I should ordinarily not have taken much notice and passed on unheedingly. Not so Faie. Seeing what was afoot, she hastened her steps calling out indignantly, "Stay thine hand, thou knave!"

The fellow looked round at her, and expectorated, and then saying in a contemptuous tone, "Boorjuice!" kicked the animal in the stomach.

"Craven miscreant!" shrilled Faie with flushed face, "to treat thy steed so. An I were a man, caitiff, shouldst stretch thy length on the ground with a broken head!"

I don't know if you have ever noticed it; but let anything unusual happen in the quietest and most deserted London street, and it becomes a mass of congested humanity before you can say "Jack Robinson!" A postman, two or three loafers from a near-by pub, a messenger boy, and several maids from the houses, all appeared instantaneously, followed by others as if they'd all been shot up out of a trap.

"Oo d'yer fink y'are?" spat out the hooligan with many decorative but unnecessary adjectives; "Boorjuice!" and aimed another kick at the poor brute. "Stop that!" I shouted, and young Clem and I added ourselves to the ring-side stands.

"Boorjuices!" said the fellow, whose conversational powers seemed unequal to elaborating what seemed to be his favourite Bourgeois theme, and without further observation grabbed the pony's headstall and gave a savage yank, kicking it again.

Faie—her eyes blazing—cried:

"For that shall this hound teach thee manners, thou craven!"

"Wot she sye?" queried loafer number one.

"Langwidge," replied his companion. Meanwhile Faie had whispered in Boris' ear, and in a flash he hurled all his avoirdupois at the ruffian, bringing him down on the kerbstone with a heavy thud.

"Gaw!" ejaculated loafer number two emotionally.

"Gaw!" echoed his friend; "Hi, Bill!" to another acquaintance across the street, "look wot's doin' 'ere!"

My dog did not attempt to touch the man on the ground; he just stood over him, but growling unpleasantly, so that his playfellow decided to stay where he was.

"What's this about?" said a deep voice, and turning, I saw Law and Order in blue uniform and helmet was in our midst; "Whose dog's this? Yours, sir?"

I nodded.

"Can't let no savage dogs attack folks that way; call him off."

"The dog isn't savage—and the fellow deserves more than the little he's got," said I as Faie spoke to Boris, who obediently returned to us; "he was grossly ill-using this animal and was insulting to this little girl, and the dog simply pushed him over."

Faie, her face a-flame, broke in, "He surely meriteth whipping at cart-tail, and prisoning in the stocks for his mis-doing," and though she had never seen or spoken to a London bobby before, she sensed his importance in the matter, adding imperiously, "an thou be one in authority, see to it!"

The constable's face was a riot of conflicting emotions as he listened to this truculent speech.

"Balmy!" he muttered, "like Joe's poor little Nipper!" and then turned to me as the man, rubbing his head, got up, looking daggers at us, and keeping a wary eye on Boris who was also watching him closely; "what was it you say he did?"

"Thrashed this pony, and kicked it," I said.

"Ho!" he observed, running his eye over the trembling beast, and turning to the man, "what you got to say?"

The chap snuffled nasally, "S'elp me, I'm a respectable man I am, earnin' anonest livin' an' these 'ere Boorjuices come an' set the dorg on me. Tike their names and addresses; I'll 'ave the lor on 'em I will."

"I've seen you hanging about before," said the Bobby meditatively, "I know your face."

"I ain't done nuthin; so wot's wrong with me dial?"

"What's right with it, you mean," replied the officer;

then perhaps realizing it was undignified to hand out back-chat, "You'll have all the law you want; I give you my word. Take that pony out of the shafts and the harness off. Let's have a look at it. Seems to me it's overloaded. Come on now! Jump to it!"

With many grumblings and black looks this was done, and disclosed a sore back, weal marks on the flanks, and out-standing ribs. The constable gravely inspected the poor brute, and took out his notebook.

"H'm," said he, "now then! Name and address. And yours too, sir. We shall want you and perhaps the young lady to give evidence."

"What are you going to charge him with?" I asked rather uncomfortably, handing him my visiting card, for I didn't at all like the idea of Faie being dragged into it.

"Working a horse in that condition for one thing," he answered, writing in his notebook. "Now you!" to the man; "you lead that pony round to High Street, and we'll see what the Vet has to say!"

"I tells yer," whined the man, "I done nuthin', an' I ain't goin' round to no pleece stition. An' as for me nime and address, start guessin'!"

"*And* obstructing of me in the execution of me duty," added the officer, licking his pencil, and making another entry.

"You don't want us to come to the station, do you?" I asked. "I'll turn up when required. You've got my card."

"No, Major," he said with a salute. "Don't want you. Not now. Later, yes." And then broke off because the scallywag, abandoning his turnout, suddenly took to his heels and ran swiftly. "Ho!" ejaculated the policeman, and jamming his helmet more firmly on his head, sprinted after him, making surprisingly good speed, and pursuer and pursued vanished round the corner, trailed by the more active members of the

crowd. Then Faie spoke softly to the quivering pony, and stroked its neck; and he nuzzled her arm gratefully. Then another constable materialised and took charge of him.[1]

But what impressed me was the fact that little Faie had a temper lurking beneath her mild exterior; and courage too; as befitted the child of her father.

She touched my arm: "Did I do wrong?" she asked with clouding eyes, "I was indeed much moved. Myself erstwhile possessed a grey steed like unto that one, the which Kellen in his humour yclept 'Kilderkin' for that he had so rounded a body. Oft did I ride him and much I loved him. And it irked me to see yon beast used so. Yet I mind me that Jennifer hath bidden me never raise my voice in anger for it were not beseeming."

"You did quite right," I said heartily. "Clem and I are proud of you. And now," as some remnants of the crowd still lingered, "let's get out of this."

So with one final caress, under the beaming eye of officer number two, to the pony, eliciting a gentle whinney in reply, she came along, and we proceeded Garden-wards.

After a few moments' meditation, she asked,

"An they capture him, will they beat him well?"

"Oh no!" replied my nephew.

"Wherefore not? What manner of punishment will be imposed?"

"He'll go to Chokey," said Clement, but seeing that she did not understand, he turned to me; "You tell her," he said.

"They may prison him," I said.

"There to starve?"

"Oh dear no! he will be well housed and fed."

She looked at both of us in turn searchingly; "I ween thou mockest me, even as Father Godwyn mocked me when

[1] Those interested in the sequel to this episode will find it in the newspaper-cutting at the end of this story.—AUTHOR.

I spake of cruelty to dumb things; aye! and of killing and eating them."

"Nay; I mocked not."

"Is he then rewarded for cruelty to his steed?" she enquired ironically.

"Well, no. But penalties be over-light; for few men love horses now."

"Kellen doth," she observed, "and so do the Franks; for he hath told me how that my father captured one of their knights in battle who, covered with wounds, yet bore them with fortitude, until one told him his charger were slain; whereon he cried upon God, and wept. Thou wilt not mock at that, Master Wilfred?"

"Never, child," I replied. "I hold him to have been a gallant and worthy warrior."

"Wherefore do thy kind no longer care for horses?"

"For the reason that stink of oil is pleasanter in their nostrils than honest smell of stables," I answered, "and we travel sitting in armoured chariots, 'stead of astride saddle. We have grown soft."

"But thou dost so travel also?"

"Aye! for my lame leg no longer alloweth me grip of knee."

"Certes," she said, "I had forgot. Forgive me. So 'twas with Kellen. But of late did he mourn that he could no longer mount and bestride his palfrey. But how cometh so sudden a change in Man's regard of animals so noble and friendly?"

What could I reply to this? It was so plain that Faie did not in her mind grasp the tremendous passage of time since "of late". I remained silent and was relieved when she switched off to something else.

"I would have you know," she said confidentially as we turned into the Broad Walk, "that to me all beasts, aye! and birds, are as friends. I understand their speech and they mine. The Child-women taught me the way of it."

"But you don't mean they really *speak* to you, do you?" asked Clement incredulously.

"That do I," she replied. "Dost doubt? Then observe what I do, and how that they come at my bidding. Pray you stand, and approach no nearer. Watch thou."

Now there was one of those bloated pigeons ambling about on the grass close by. We obeyed Faie's request to keep still, while she went gently to it, making a sound with her lips, half a soft hiss, half a coo. The bird cocked its head sideways, cooing back as if saying "Hello! it's you, is it?" and instead of fighting shy, boldly, even eagerly, waddled up to her, allowing her to pick it up and stroke its plumage. Then she held it out on her wrist, with the same sounds, and it rose in the air, flying off in the direction of the clumps of trees near the Round Pond.

"She will summon others. Come, let us follow her flight," whispered Faie. And when we got close to the trees she asked us again to stay where we were, while she advanced a few paces, with the same sounds from her lips. In a second a brace or two of pigeons, and scores of sparrows, swooped down to her, and three or four grey squirrels slipped down the tree-trunks and loped towards her. The appearance of the last-named was a signal to every dog within sight to come tearing down on us, followed by their agitated mistresses in panic lest their pets were going to have a thorough mix-up, or (as I did) that squirrel-slaughter was about to take place on a large scale. But Faie just swept her glance over the tykes as they advanced, and gave a low whistle, and all stopped dead in their tracks, sitting back with their tongues out, looking oh so innocent! You could almost hear each one say, "What! me touch the dear little furry things? No such thing. The idea never came into my head." Then after the animals had climbed up to her shoulders, and the birds had fluttered up to perch on her hands, she whistled again softly and they went on their various ways. After which she patted one or two of the dogs

and they also returned to their owners, who were clustering round with their mouths open in surprise. I fancy they must have decided we were members of some animal-performing troupe, and I felt I'd had enough of publicity for one day.

"Still dost thou doubt?" laughed Faie to Clem.

"Nay, nor ever did we," I answered for him.

Then we took her to see Peter Pan, and the carved tree in the children's playground, both of which she purred over, her face alight with pleasure. And I told her the story of Peter, and how he never grew up, thinking in my own mind there was some analogy between her and him, but not quite able to see where it lay.

After a lunch at a restaurant—where a vegetarian alternative to porridge was found for her in the shape of an omelette, Clem suggested, and I agreed, it would interest her to see Madame Tussaud's. So off we went in a taxi, she observing that the old rattle-trap we happened to pick on was "like unto the chariot with concealed horses therein which had borne her the day before at Pommereine"—meaning my luxurious car!—at which my graceless nephew sniffed derisively and audibly, until she added in serious tones, "Yet it hath not the grandeur thereof nor the space within."

When we arrived at the imposing establishment in the Marylebone Road, our little guest gasped, and clutched my arm, for at first she imagined the immobile figures were part human, and their life-like appearance was due to some miraculous form of embalming, until I explained they were "but waxen". She was especially impressed with the model of the police-constable; her comment being that it "greatly resembled the person of importance" who had handled the pony business, but that the dummy's features had "a greater semblance of youth." But when we came to the groups in period costumes, she got quite worked up over those about the fifteenth century, exclaiming,

"Of a surety Father Godwyn and Kellen must be nigh to us?" Clem tactlessly replied it was quite likely; the outcome of which was she intimated her intention to stop there till they turned up. I had to use every argument I could think of to remove the idea from her mind, and it was only when I promised we would search for them again "come the morrow" that with many a glance behind, she consented to come away before the show was locked up for the night.

That evening Clem, after trying to persuade me to break my rule for once and take her with him to the "Movies" —ghastly word!—went off by himself. When he had gone I got out the ancient MSS., explaining that there was something about her in them. She was all agog, and asked eagerly if she might look at them. So I handed them to her, and she turned over the skins, all of a sudden trembling and crying, "Why! this be indited by the good Father!"

"How dost know that?" I asked.

"Have I not seen him writing time and oft?"

"Then perhaps," I said half jokingly, "thou canst read it."

"Of a truth that can I!" she said with animation, and read a few lines far more fluently than I could.

"How cometh it that thou canst decipher these?" I enquired. "Who taught thee?"

"Father Godwyn," replied she simply. "And did he not expound to me the use of writ characters, and instruct me in the forming of them?"

"What!" I cried. "Canst write?"

"Place before me ink-horn and goose-quill, and I will shew thee."

I handed her a sheet of our note-paper and my fountain-pen, both of which she examined with curiosity, afterwards squaring herself at the table and writing, in the same crabbed characters as in the Parchments,

Writ by me Faie onlie childe of Avril de Pommereine and of Sylph. . . .

and then dropped the pen and burst into tears.

Poor child! alone among strangers in a strange world, aching for the sight of faces known to her, but which never appeared! My heart bled for her; and I didn't know what to do or say to comfort. I just took her hand in mine, stroking her curls, saying nothing, while Boris put his great head on her knee and snuffled sympathetically.

"Oh!" she wailed, "Kellen! I want Kellen! or Jennifer!"

"Can you not be happy with us?" I asked gently.

"In sooth," she said with heaving shoulders, "thou'rt kind; and so is Clement and this dear dog. Think me not ungrateful, but so much there be that disturbeth me. Oh Kellen, Kellen, I would thou wert here!"

"Faie, my dear," I said when she had calmed down a little, "perhaps we could make thee happier if we knew what thou canst tell us beyond what we read here? Thou seest we know so little of thee, and thou less of us. Canst add anything to what has been writ here?"

"I cannot tell," she answered, "for I have but now gazed upon these writings, and know not what be contained therein."

"Then," said I, "come and sit by me and we will read them together." And this we did, she sometimes kneeling by me and sometimes standing up to look over my shoulder while I read, now and then prompting me when I boggled over a word. But broke down again when I pointed out her father's writing, taking the roll from me and kissing it. And again when we came to the priest's description of the passing of Sir Avril and her mother, her tears fell fast, and a wave of intense pity passed over me so that I took her in my arms,

setting her light body on my knee, stroking her hair and soothing her, until her sobs ceased and she lay passive, but entreated me to read no more for a while.

Then raising her head from my shoulder, she put up one hand and stroked my face.

"Verily, I ween thou lovest me as do my mother's kin," she said.

This reminded me of something: "Tell me, Faie, when we found thee, thou spak'st two names which are also in the writings; Violas and Floreal, they being the sisters of thy mother."

"True; they and others were my winged Child-women who played with me when that I was little. Now that I am older, they come to me only when I sleep, and we wander in happy companionship and converse. 'Tis then I be as they, save that I be wingless, they telling me 'tis by reason of my not being wholly of elfin birth. But when I do wake, they evanish."

"Of what ages be they?"

"Of what ages? In sooth I know not."

"Be they in youthful guise or stricken in years?"

"Oh! they resemble me; always hath it been that my mother's folk grow not old as those of my sire—he being born of earth."

"Be they fair in seeming or dark?"

"They be fair of hair as was Sylphiane, my mother; eke gentle of demeanour and soft of voice withal when that they appear to me in the night-watches."

"Tell me thy dreams," I said.

"Oh! they be indeed blissful! I be therein taken to the Faerie Groves, and my mother's people make much of me. Aye, also doth their Queen, for as 'tis set down, she loved my Mother with an exceeding love. Loving me also, oft hath she importuned me to join them for aye, and for ever abandon that which she laughingly called my prison-cell. For ere I

attained my tenth year, she did explain to me that by Special Faerie Ordinance, 'tis enacted that I, being of true Dryad blood by my mother, Sylphiane, and not wholly earth-born, the laws of the realm had been relaxed in one instance only, and that in my favour; and by virtue thereof, when that I say I will it so, I shall be received by her; to be one of her liege subjects as from the beginning, and in my mother's stead. And she hath herself shewn me wings—the which will shroud me from mortal eyes—laid by for me 'mid rose-petals, 'gainst the time when I shall say to her 'I am thine, oh Queen!'"

"And thy answer to all this?" I asked with a cold feeling down my spine.

"I have not decided; for I called to mind when that I told Father Godwyn of my joyance with the Child-women, he sternly reproved me. For he held they were but visionary creatures of idle fancy, their promises as unsubstantial as they themselves; also that though life had its sorrows, yet there was glorious ending thereto far in worth exceeding those I had tried to describe unto him. Sin roused from happy slumber. . . ."

"What roused thee?"

"That which roused me when I slept aforetime; bay of hound; once 'twas Wolf; on this last occasion thy hound Boris."

"I see," said I. "Well, continue."

"Sin I have been roused again I have found his words come true in a measure; for since yestreen I have indeed found life to be sorrowful. I have no mortal kith, my habitation hath no being; those ancient friends which fostered me appear not; the very raiment upon me be not mine; and have I not already witnessed cruelty of man to beast; and the gallant horse, the friend of man, spurned in contempt? Verily, I ween that if the Queen shall again summon me, I shall answer Yea to her tender adjuration, for then, no matter what may

hap to my body, my Dryad spirit shall forthwith attain peace and happiness."

"And could the love of me and mine cause thee no happiness? Nor be of worth in thine eyes?" I asked somewhat reproachfully.

"Yea, maybe; but I feel in my heart that those who harboured me in and about the Forest of Pommereine, and who knew and loved my mother, also loving me for her sake, have stronger claim. And now," she said, slipping off my knee, "am I aweary and would go to rest. And perchance my sweet Violas and Floreal may come to me, and soothe my vexed spirit."

"We will speak more of this anon," I said, as I replaced the Parchments in a drawer. But I spoke but sadly, for from that moment grew the conviction in my mind that this adorable visitor would only touch our life for a brief time, and then be lost to us. And though I put the thought away, it returned again and again with increasing force and disheartenment.

After she had gone, I took with me to my own room all the parchments save her father's chronicle, and studied them again well into the early hours of the morning; hoping that by re-reading them some fresh light might be thrown upon a situation the full force and effect of which she, poor mite, did not yet know; being cognizant only of the earlier part of her history, but not yet of the witch's curse—apparently so direfully fulfilled.

My perturbation of mind was not lessened by speculation as to what attitude my sister would adopt, with her practical outlook and direct method of expression of her opinions, being apt to call a spade a spade and no beating about the bush. From the most gullible individual I could not but expect disbelief. In her, incredulity would be doubly and trebly accentuated.

And somehow the thought jarred on me.

Close pals as we had always been, I did not look forward to my interview with her, anticipating as I did, irony and sarcasm. But I took a little comfort from the thought that the best advocate for the truth, would be Faie herself.

I venture to believe that no one will contradict me when I observe that I had plenty to think about!

CHAPTER VII

Aunt Scratch Sharpens Her Claws

I DON'T need to introduce myself, for my nephew has done so already in rather disrespectful terms. But I bear no malice. It is true that I have had to discipline him occasionally. It's good for the young, especially in these days when Youth is apt to get above itself, and enjoy a laxity which would never have been permitted when I was a girl. However, I noticed he hints, though not in words, that if I'm a beast I'm a just beast. I'm satisfied with that. And I'm very fond of him.

As for bossing my brother Wilfred; well, so far as it's good for him, I daresay I do, and if you can't boss a brother five years your junior, whom can you? But it's mostly in domestic matters; in those of larger importance I have confidence in his common-sense, and would never question his better judgment.

So don't let Clement's remarks lead you to think I'm a Gorgon in petticoats. I'm not.

Wilfred, Clement, and the dog went down to Devonshire to see about house-building, and I took the opportunity of spending a few days with Jane Ormeroyde. And a pretty kettle of fish I found waiting for me when I got back. I'm not easily thrown out of my stride, but I was then.

I returned to the flat about ten that night, and as I pushed in my latchkey I heard Boris' bark. There's no mistaking it; it reminds me of a big gong being banged in an express train going full speed under a bridge. Then Scrivens appeared.

"What's the dog doing here?" I asked. "He went down with the others in the car."

"Yes'm, but they came back early yesterday with Miss Faie."

"With . . . ?"

"With Miss Faie, ma'm."

"What are you talking about? Who is Miss Faie?"

"Miss Pommereine'm."

"Miss Pommereine? And who may she be?" I enquired rather nonplussed.

"The Major's cousin, mum."

I nearly dropped my suit-case in my surprise. "Major's cousin? We've no cousin of that name. However, where is everybody?" I asked.

"The young lady and Master Clement are in bed'm."

Just then Wilfred appeared. "Ah! there you are, Megs," said he as Scrivens faded away. "I didn't know where you had gone, or I'd have met you at the Station. Had a good time?"

"Yes, thanks, old boy," I said, "but how is it you have come back so soon? And what's all this Scrivens is saying about Pommereines and things?"

"Oh, that," he said. "Yes. Yes. Well, er . . . take your things off and come along. I've a lot to tell you. Have you dined?"

"Yes, thanks, on the train. I'll be with you in a jiff." And inside of five minutes I was in our sitting-room, bursting with curiosity.

I've never seen my brother look so much at a loss—as if he had something on his mind. Kept eyeing me sideways and then looking away and shuffling his feet. I remember him just like that years ago when he was caught in the jam-cupboard.

"Somehow you don't look overjoyed to see me," I said. "What's the matter? What have you been up to?"

"Oh," he replied, clearing his throat and staring at the ceiling, "Clem and I went yesterday to see Peter Pan"—and with an uneasy grin—"the ducks on the Serpentine, and the painted tree, and the waxworks, and to-day Kew Gardens, the Tower and St. Paul's Cathedral," and then paused, and came out with a rush, "with Faie."

"Don't drivel!" I said. "Who is this Faie? Where did you meet her? Scrivens says her name is Pommereine, and I nearly told her to go and put her head in a bag. Come on! Out with it. Who is she?"

"Scrivens?" the fathead replied, fencing and playing for time, "Scrivens is our parlourmaid; and has been with us for . . ."

"Wilfred! if you don't come to the point, I'll do what I haven't done for years;—pull your hair for you. Do wake up. Count five and start. Now! one, two, three, four, five and off! WHO . . . IS . . . FAIE? Where did you dig her up?"

"'Dig' is right," he said. "In Devonshire."

"Well, get on; what's her father's name?"

"Avril," he said.

"Rum name. French for April. And first of April is All Fools' Day. However, Avril what? Smith? Jones? Thompson?"

"Avril de Pommereine."

"Oh, it *is* Pommereine, is it? Well—and her mother's?"

"Sylphiane."

"H'mph! Sounds Frenchy too. Where are they supposed to hang out?"

"They're dead ages ago."

"Oh! Well, what age is she? Young? Old? My age?"

"She's just fifteen," he said.

"Tall? Short? Dark or fair?"

"About four foot nothing. Fair," he replied.

"We're getting something at last. Scrivens says she's a

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cousin; that's nonsense of course. Is she supposed to be a connection? If so, what?"

"Well . . . as far as I can make out . . . she might have been our great-great-great-grandmother a few more times removed."

"Great-grand . . .? Oh Wilfred, don't be a ninny, with your great-grandmothers. You've just said she's only fifteen!"

"It is queer, isn't it. Look here, Megs; I find it so difficult, I don't know where to begin."

"Begin at the beginning," I said, "and keep on at it, for you're getting me all worked up."

"Just what I don't want," he said, "not yet. But I promise you will be before I've finished."

"Then for goodness' sake let me know the worst before I have hysterics!"

"Listen then," he began, "a tree close by the old Tower blew down in the storm, and Boris began scratching. . . ."

"Heaven grant me patience! I want to know about this Faie, and you babble about trees and Boris scratching himself!"

"It's all part of it," he replied, "it's confusing enough, goodness knows! Do let me explain in my own way, for my feelings are very mixed; partly funk, I think."

"Funk!" I cried. "You, a V.C. man! talking about funk?"

"Well, yes. Funk of goodness knows what. But let me get on. When the tree blew down, and Boris began scratching at the roots, he uncovered a partly buried stone step. Clem and I scraped it clear, and then found three more leading down. We cleared those too, and came to a closed door in the foot of the tower. We burst it open and found Faie in a vault in bed in her night-gown."

"In bed in a night-gown! Now, don't go off the rails again," I urged him. "You were doing fine. Don't switch

off to lingerie just as we're getting somewhere! You say this girl was underground with the steps buried. Well, then, how did she get in?"

"My dear girl, she was put in," and he gulped, "somewhere about the year fourteen-hundred-and-fifty-two."

I gaped at him. "Fourt . . . ?" I squeaked.

"Yes; fourteen-hundred-and-fifty-two, or perhaps a year or so later. Incredible, isn't it?"

I drew a long breath, and when I recovered the use of my voice, I cried,

"I shall have a seizure in a minute! Look here, are you mad or am I?"

"I knew you'd say something like that," he groaned. "I feel as if I were in a dream. But I'm not. And there's Faie to prove it. And what's more there are documents as well, with her history in them. And about Pommereine Castle too. So it did exist. Now what about your legends and traditions! They were boxed up in the vault, too, only the bottom fell out."

"What d'ye mean, the bottom fell out? Out of the vault?"

"No! no! Sorry! The box they were in. And I repeat, there was this child; and she's in the spare room now, I suppose asleep." And then he paused, and went on, "And when she's asleep she's in fairyland."

"What?"

"She is convinced that when she's asleep she's with Fairies; and she knows their names too—or at any rate two of them. And she has also mentioned the name of their Queen—Queen Hyacinth. If you'll only have a look at the manuscripts you will see her own mother was a sprite—a Dryad—called Sylphiane, who married our ancestor Sir Avril de Pommereine."

"Piffle! Oh Wilfred, what *is* this ridiculous yarn you've been stuffed with! My dear good lunatic, do use your brains

if you have any. How could a fairy—a purely fictitious mental creation—marry a human being of flesh and blood?"

"But that's all explained by Sir Avril himself and the priest."

"Priest?"

"Father Godwyn."

"And who was he supposed to be when he was at home?"

"He was the chaplain at Pommereine Castle, who married them in the year fourteen-hundred-and-thirty-five."

"Who says so?"

"He does; in his own words. He and the Seneschal both knew Sir Avril married a fairy. So their daughter is half one herself!" wound up Wilfred, looking at me appealingly.

I waited for a minute to get my breath. I was dreadfully concerned about him and what in spite of his earnestness and air of belief in it, sounded like nonsensical babble. Then said I decisively, "You must have had a touch of the sun. You'd better see Meadowes."

"No, I'm all right; Meadowes is no use to me."

"Well!" I said, more to humour him than anything else, "where are these documents?"

"Here," he said, fishing them out of a drawer.

"Why! they're on parchment!" I cried.

"Yes; and look at the dates!"

"I can't read this squiggly writing without my stronger specs. And there's a lot of it too."

"I'll read them to you if you are not too fagged. Shall I? It may help a bit. Faie knows only the earlier part of them, which we read together last night."

"Never felt less tired in my life. Carry on."

Then he did, right through; pausing only to explain where he had stopped in his reading with the girl on the previous night. And the stuff took a longish time to get through. I am afraid I listened half-heartedly and with some impatience. At the end he peered at me, looking like a lost dog.

"Quaint stories," I commented, still trying to keep a grip on myself. "Wonder who wrote 'em for her? Now, tell me. What possible connection can the Faie mentioned in these romances have with whoever it is you have parked in the spare room?"

"Why! it's she herself! The same Faie."

"Oh nonsense!" I couldn't see daylight yet, except that it was pretty plain someone had been pulling my brother's leg, and said so.

"Oh Megs; how can you be so sure of that, after hearing what I have read? There couldn't be two Faies! Another thing; ask Clem about the boxful of her clothes; which he himself saw—but they all went phut."

"Oh? This is something new. Say that again slowly."

"There were some dresses in a coffer. Clem saw them and lifted one out while I was outside the vault, absorbed in the manuscripts. She told him they were hers. But almost immediately afterwards they all dissolved in dust. So did the bedding she had been lying on. We hadn't opened up the place ten minutes, or perhaps twenty, before it happened. I saw the debris with my own eyes. What do you say to that?"

"Say? Why! that you have got dust in your noddle, and had wool pulled over your eyes! And Clem ditto ditto."

"I don't know so much about that. Whatever you may think of me, he is no fool. You ask him about the box. And whether the poor child wasn't dreadfully frightened and distressed, when after she had shed her night-gown she found she hadn't a stitch to cover herself with. It was letting in the outer air that did it of course. And I rather fancy it must have been proximity of the bedding to her living body which in some mysterious way preserved it until we broke in."

"Wilfred! you've gone absolutely cuckoo! *Do* think what you're saying and don't talk such utter rubbish. Why! doesn't it occur to you that after about forty-eight hours

under the soil, without air, she herself would have been dead as Julius Cæsar? I suppose what really happened was that this imp of mischief got in, or else someone shoved her in, and then piled the earth on top of her, carefully choosing the time just before you were due to arrive!"

"How could they choose the time when they didn't even know I was going there that day? And that doesn't account for her rig-out suddenly dissolving into masses of grey fluff. And please don't call her an imp of mischief. There's none in her composition. She's the sweetest thing I've ever come across. She's a dear. She's no more capable of deception than you are. The earth hadn't been touched by anybody just before we turned up. It was well settled in. Quite solid, and piles of dead and rotting leaves on top. Besides; there's the ring. How do you get over that?"

"Ring? What ring?"

"Didn't I mention that? Why, the gold signet-ring on her finger."

"Well; what about it?"

"Megs! it has our own coat of arms and crest engraved on it! And it's mentioned, as you know, by Father Godwyn as being her father's."

That shook me a bit; but I was still trying to keep hold of my sanity. "Easy enough to get that done anywhere; copied of course; College of Heralds. Have you got it?"

"No; she wears it always. And there's the diamond one."

"Diamond one?" and I sniffed. "Sixpenny bazaar more likely!"

"Nothing of the sort; it was her mother's, as I read out to you. I got her to try it on glass. They're real stones. Small, but of the finest water."

"Pooh! all part of the fake. For fake it must be. Someone—I don't know who, nor why—has coached this girl in her part, and somehow or other managed to put her where

you were intended to find her. To get rid of her at your expense. Some unwanted brat, I expect. That's what it is. Clear as mud!"

"Megs! Can't you understand? The earth was jammed right up against the door. Not a sign of previous disturbance."

"Then there must have been another way in."

"No there wasn't. Clem and I both looked outside. And besides I sounded all the walls inside, and they were solid masonry."

"Tchah! And you mean to say you brought this impostor. . . ."

"No, Megs; not impostor."

"Oh well," I snapped, "this Pearl of Price if you like, all the way to London?"

"Yes."

"With nothing on?"

"No; she put on Clem's clothes."

"What! With you both there?"

"No, certainly not; she dressed in the vault. We were outside."

"And Clem went back to the hotel in his shirt?"

He shifted uneasily. "Of course not; I drove the car back to the pub and got his hiking rig for her."

"And you've been roaming round London with this girl dressed like a boy?"

"Not exactly. I got a dress at the stores down there. To put over the shorts. And a hat. And a cloak."

"I wish I'd been there! I've missed something. I'd like to have seen you shopping feminine frippery. What about stockings?"

"She doesn't wear them. Nor shoes."

"So she's trapesing round the town in a reach-me-down with nothing on underneath, bare legs and grimy feet?"

"She's still wearing the shorts, and sandals."

"Help! A pretty figure she must cut!"

"She looks like a little lady," he said, "and would, whatever she had on."

I waited a while, chewing all this over before I spoke again. "And I'm to see this piece of goods to-morrow, am I?"

"Yes, but not 'piece of goods', Megs. She is as pure-minded and unaffected a child as one could meet in a day's march."

"Nice-looking?"

"Lovely."

"Oh you men! a pretty face and where are you! By the way what does she call you? Great-great-great-grandpa?"

He dismissed this question with a gesture. "There's another thing. Look at this. She wrote this herself last night," and he handed me a bit of our note-paper with these words in old-fashioned characters on it:

"Writ by me Faie onlie childe of Sir Avril de Pommereine and of Sylph . . ." and then there was a wobbly line as if the pen had started to Tango.

I sniffed. "Of course!" I said, "more coaching by somebody, intended like the witch curse to give an air of verisimilitude to an otherwise bald and unconvincing narrative. Very clever. You've been had, old boy, you've been had!"

"But my dear Megs, who on earth would take all that trouble to do down an obscure retired Artillery Major?"

"No one with your army record is obscure," I said, "and isn't it all over the place down there that you've bought that land and are going to build a house on it and live there? They had their victim on the very doorstep. Probably think your middle name's Dives!" Then something else struck me. "I suppose she has four solid meals a day and three helpings of everything?"

"My dear girl, a canary would starve on what she lives on. She won't touch meat."

"What on earth does she feed on? Groundsel and bird-seed? And what does she talk like? I suppose every time she opens her mouth she puts her foot in it? Does she drop her aitches? And eat with her mouth open; and say 'Eh?' every second?"

"Certainly not; she's a thoroughbred. Her speech is quite refined, only she uses the language of five centuries ago."

"Eh?—there! I've said it myself now!"

"She speaks as they did in the Middle Ages."

"Go on! God wot, Marry-come-up, and By my Halidom and that sort of stuff?"

"Of course not; she doesn't use swear-words, but the phraseology is archaic, and at first you may find it difficult to understand her."

"That I won't," I replied grimly. "I shall understand her all right. So she will me. What'll you bet she won't be crawling out of this flat with a policeman within half an hour of my introduction to her?"

"She knows the police already," he said with a half smile; "she had a few words with a constable yesterday morning."

"Had a few words . . .? Rowed with him, d'you mean?"

"No; but she did with a larrikin," and he gave me a jumbled story about a horse and cart.

"Then, according to you she's a sort of blend of the Boanerges, Niobe, and Doll Tearsheet. Nice person for a quiet family, I don't think! However, you wait till I see her and then watch my smoke!"

"I knew you'd be incredulous, Megs. I admit it all sounds very queer. But I'll stake my honour on her probity."

"Bother your honour!" I answered; "your honour won't pay for a dinner out, and seats for three at the best show going, for that's the stake we're going to have on it. Evens."

"Right," said poor worried Wilfred, perking up a little, "and it will be you who will pay."

"We'll see," said I. "Meanwhile, to sum it all up, you are asking me—me! a grown woman with, I hope, an average amount of grey matter under my transformation, to share your insane delusion that you dug out of a hole as if she were a cabbage stump or something, somebody planted in a vault; a somebody who's five centuries old and fifteen years of age at the same time; who goes about in a night-gown, her kit including a novelette with her history complete with family curse done on sheep-skins; pretends to hob-nob with fairy-folk, and shouts at folks in the street! It's a bit too thick, as Clement would say. I don't believe a word she says. You're a poor deluded idiot! a dear old idiot, but . . . well . . . an idiot! And you, whom I've always thought the most levelheaded and unimaginative of men, and always stand for doing the correct thing, you take a bare-legged hussy dressed in oddments, to St. Paul's and the Waxworks! Did you meet anyone you know?"

"No."

"Good job too! Well, I'm not senile, at least not yet, and the one thing I'm certain of is that I shall telephone Meadowes in the morning."

"You'll do nothing of the kind," he said. "Meadowes! Bother Meadowes! What do you think I want with Meadowes? Dash it all, if I AM being victimised, the fewer who know it the better, even if he is the family medico!"

"Doctors don't tell. Let me have him over," I urged.

"I won't see him if you do!" he snapped out in that tone which he uses when he's being more than usually pig-headed. Then in a milder voice, "but I wish you weren't going to see Faie with all this prejudice in your mind. The poor child is sufficiently uncertain about herself as it is. And if she comes up against austere looks, and an atmosphere of suspicion, she will be unhappier still. As it is, you see she broke down when she wrote that scrap of paper, and couldn't finish it."

"Couldn't remember how to spell the word, that's why. And I suppose you slobbered over her! But bless the man, d'you think I'm going to bite her head off first go? I should be as big a foo . . . I mean I should be going quite the wrong way to work. No! I shall be all smiles and honey—until she gives herself away; and then she'll hear from me in quite a different style!"

"You wait till you see her," said he.

"Yes; and you watch me pounce!" I replied.

CHAPTER VIII

Miss Pomary Changes Her Mind

WHAT with anxiety about my brother, whom I firmly believed to be a victim of an extraordinarily stupid and senseless hoax, I spent a restless night and was more than usually glad when Scrivens entered with my early morning tea. Groping for inside information, to her I said :

" You were surprised to see our visitor, I expect ? "

" Yes indeed'm. You could have knocked me down with a feather."

" Hope she hasn't given you much trouble and is behaving nicely ? "

" Oh, the dear lamb gives no trouble, 'm, and I shouldn't mind if she did, being as she's that sweet and gentle."

" Humph ! What time is she likely to get up ? "

" She's already up'm. She says she never stays in bed after five o'clock. Winter or summer."

" Rather early—hope she doesn't disturb anyone ? "

" Oh no, mum, she's like a little mouse talking softly to Boris who never leaves her."

" Oh, is she ? " said I, dwelling on this, trying to visualise a mouse squeaking small-talk into the ear of a Great Dane.

" Yes'm ; just as if he was yewman. She told me she could understand what he says to her. And Master Clem says it's the same with birds ; she has only to single and they come off the trees to her ! "

" Curious accomplishment," I observed ; " but useful in the shooting season—no beaters wanted."

"Oh no, mum! she wouldn't do that. She can't bear them being killed, bless her heart!"

"You seem to have fallen for her!"

"I have that'm; and begging your pardon'm, so will you."

"Humph!" I said.

And that was all the change I got out of Scrivens.

I'm pretty punctual at breakfast time. The smell of coffee and frying bacon always makes me throw my head back and sniff appreciatively, like those kids in the advertisements. But this morning in our tiny sitting-room I dug myself in at least half an hour earlier than usual, taking care to sit with my back to the light. Then Clement came in to say "Good morning, Aunt," and I bundled him out quick, saying, "Outside! I want to see this girl by herself."

"What girl? Oh, you mean Faie! Right-ho, I'll vamoose," he said. And did.

I had carefully considered exactly what I was going to start with, and had picked on what I thought the best opening remark. Couldn't go beyond the first sentence of course, because the rest depended on circs. My idea was something like this: "Good morning, my new-found niece! How charming, but how strange for you to have come across us like this! Come and let us have a nice cosy chat." I was just repeating this over to myself when Boris bounced in. He's a clumsy lump, but he likes me—well I like him for the matter of that—and he dashed up and straddled his huge body over me, scrabbling me about trying to lick my face. Result; me pushed this way and that, out of breath, with my hair all anyhow; while a swish of his tail swept the pepper and salt things off the corner of the table.

"Get down, you brute!" I said, half vexed, half laughing, and feeling—and I suppose looking—quite unstuck and with about as much dignity as a sack of straw.

And of course she must choose that precise moment to come in!

I peered at her round Boris' great chest and shoulders while she came towards me, dressed in a bunchy cotton skirt fitting all wrong everywhere, with her arms out and her face eager, trilling—and her voice was certainly musical and pleasant—"How it rejoiceth my heart to see thee, sister of the kind Wilfred!" and then broke off to Boris, "Oh, thou rude hound! see what hast done! Lie thou still, naughty one!"

Well, I ask you, how was I to get my opening bit off my chest after that? I didn't try, but patted my hair and smoothed my dress; inanely gurgling, still a bit pumped, "so there you are; and you *have* got shoes and stockings on after all!" A most inept speech.

She curtseyed and kissed my hand, "I have counted the very hours since yestermorn, knowing I were to see thee this day!" and knelt down by me, drinking me in, and with nimble fingers smoothing a straggling lock of my hair, hopelessly out of place as the result of Boris' greeting. And I twigged the rings. One had the crest all right. "There is much I would say to thee," she went on.

"Same here," I said, and stupid fool as I was, instead of being prim and standoffish, I found myself returning smile for smile. However, I recollected myself and shut my face with a snap.

"Where did you get those stockings?" I asked.

"These hosen? they be roomy enow! Thy serving-wench hath lent me them for the nonce."

"How do you manage to keep them up?"

To which she with her eyes brimming with laughter replied, "Verily, her garters being too generous for the girth of mine own legs, I have even rolled the tops down—which serves to tauten them, but not too well."

Her amusement was infectious, and I giggled in sympathy. Quite wrong, of course.

"And the shoes?"

"Thy brother obtained the shoon for me, he wishful I should keep my feet covered. Therefore I do so to pleasure him, but i'faith, I could wish them elsewhere, for they pinch where they should ease, and be loose where they should be snug."

"And why were you anxious to see me?"

"Why, forsooth, did I not yearn for company and converse of mine own sex and station? Thy brother and Clement and this dear hound have been kindness itself, and yet . . . and yet . . ." she murmured with trembling lip, "oh, thou dost not, thou canst not, understand."

"Lord," I said to myself, "here's the water-works beginning already!" But she got a grip of herself and didn't even sniff, but went on "I be indeed in sad bewilderment and confusion of mind."

"Why? What about?"

"Oh! I know not why I be here. I know not how I be come hither. My very dwelling of Pommereine is no longer. All be of strangeness. And verily, how I lack . . . how I look for . . . those faces familiar unto me; the stern but good-hearted Father; the forthright but kindly Kellen . . . and . . . and . . . Jennifer."

"Tell me about them," I said, for I was right off the course I had set, and instead of pursuing my intended enquiries, I was all of a dither; and—blest if I knew why—I had already begun to warm to the child, and to understand Wilfred's feeling about her.

"I can tell thee much," she said answering me, "and moreover thy brother hath writings of the Father Godwyn; aye and he saith of Kellen also, following those of my dear father who hath gone Above."

"And when was that?" I asked, wondering if we were getting near where I could pounce, if at all.

"Alas! he followed my mother, who joined the Angels, now fifteen years agone."

I put in another bit of cross-examination; "And how old were you then?"

"I had been born but a month when they went hence; nor do I remember them. But I have heard much of them by word of mouth; and also yesternight in the writings, and me-seems as though I had known them well."

"Where did they die? And why?"

"At Pommereine; my mother through mortal illness and my father straightway after of sore grief at her Passing. It be all set down in the parchments, for thy brother read portions thereof to me a few hours back. Furthermore, I saw where he laid them, and this morn, soon as 'twas light, I went thither and found the part thereof superscribed by my father, the which I took to my sleeping-place and read again and again with mine own eyesen . . . and wept over. Me-thinks it would have shamed my sire to see me so distraught, but my tears fell fast at thought of his grief in that he had lost my mother whom he dearly loved, and she him."

You know my answer to this ought to have been, "Right! that's that. And now let's talk sense for a change, and cut out the early English." My brain was telling me to do it, but my heart shouted it down. What I did do, was to stroke her curls with a hand not over-steady and talk sob-stuff. "But be at ease, for you are now with those who wish to be your friends and who will love you."

I could have kicked myself. I felt I was talking as if I were addressing a Sunday-school class—and after all my sarcastic remarks to Wilfred too!

"Verily, I would that thou should'st love me; yet though thine eyes be kind, therein lurketh doubt of me," adding, looking me straight in the face, "And meliketh not that."

"You're wrong," I said weakly, "quite wrong. I don't doubt you. But I do want to know things. When did you last see these friends you speak of?"

"Hadst thou asked me this but yesternight, I had replied

that three suns had alone risen sin Father Godwyn withstood the witches ; but I wot now that it may be longer—and when my mind dwelleth thereon I am affrighted."

" Don't be," I said, stroking her hair, " you're with us now, and what is past is past. Tell me where are now those writings that you have spoken of."

" I have but now replaced them. Did I do wrong in taking them ? "

" Of course not. They seem to belong to you, not to us. My brother read them hastily to me last night, but I do not remember all that is in them."

At that moment Scrivens came in with the breakfast things and swept her eye over us, her face and whole attitude a complacent " Didn't I say so ? " I was so worked up by the whole business, I nearly made a face at her. Unladylike ? Yes, I daresay, but it would have been a relief.

" We must have a long talk by and by, Faie," I whispered.

" That indeed will we. Peradventure my mind will then be comforted. Only, I pray you, have faith in me," she cried, her lips a-tremble, " for my head be all in confusion ; forget not how lorn am I."

At these pathetic words so pleadingly uttered, silly that I was, I fished for my hanky. Oh yes ! You needn't tell me ! I know I had called Wilfred an idiot the night before, and I felt I myself was no better. At that moment he put his head round the door in a furtive fashion, and when he saw me blowing my nose and dabbing my cheek, his face looked as if it were lit up from inside.

" Faie and I have been making friends," I said, with emphasis on the ' friends ' and looking him square in the eye, " and I can see we're going to be great chums " ; adding " Ecoutez, mon vieux ; c'est bien merveilleux ; mais enfin, c'est vrai." He came across the room, and to my surprise, for he is not as a rule demonstrative, he put his arm round my shoulders and kissed me, murmuring in a broken voice,

"Thank you Megs; thanks indeed, I am so glad." While I blushed as Faie said, "I know not the meaning, but thou spakest in the Frankish tongue, the which Kellen hath aped, to humour me."

Then enter Clement, whose impertinence is irrepressible, with "You two girls finished your little secrets? Well! well! May I sit down to brekker, Aunt? Or would you rather I took it out on the mat?" To which I replied, "Cheek!" and pinched it for him.

I found Wilfred was right about the child's appetite. She ate the merest scrap.

After breakfast I sent them and the dog out; for I wanted to be by myself and read those parchments through quietly right from beginning to end; not only the part Faie knew about, but the later ones of the Priest and the Seneschal. And I did. What a job! Studying them—some parts quite unintelligible to me—as best I could, sometimes with a magnifying glass, the whole morning. And meditated over Wilfred's story of the vault and the rings. And the fairy-dream business and all. And at the end of it I was still where I was at the beginning. I couldn't bring myself to grasp the innards of the affair at all. The documents seemed perfectly genuine. If they weren't, they were clever forgeries. But I came to the conclusion that I must see the vault for myself. For I'm pretty good at summing people up and it seemed to me that the child, if she was a tool, was an innocent one. And I thought I might perhaps tumble on something the others had overlooked.

So after lunch I observed, "Wilfred, when are you going back to Devonshire?"

"Oh, I don't know; why?"

"Because I'm coming with you, to inspect your mining operations."

"Just what I should like. How about to-morrow?"

"Suits me all right. First decent train?"

"Splendid," he said. "All of us?"

"Yes," I replied.

"Need I?" asked Clement, "because now I'm up here, I don't want to miss Lords on Saturday."

"Just as you like," I said.

"Boris cometh also?" anxiously enquired Faie, who had kicked off one of her shoes and was pawing about after it under the table with her stockinged toes, until we saw that Boris was sitting up with it in his mouth, looking pleased with himself.

"Well, I don't know about him," I was beginning to say, when I saw the corners of her mouth turn down. "Oh, all right. He shall come too." At which she slipped off her chair and kissed my hand, and an absurd desire came over me to draw her on my knee and pet her. Me! who as a rule fight shy of children—generally horrid little prigs with jammy mouths! But I fought it down.

That afternoon I took her to Wharridge's and bought her a little dress to go on with, and other things, including a wide-brimmed straw hat, which suited her A.I. And looking back, I recall with gladness how like she really was to a daughter of Eve, and with what pleasure she roamed from one department to another, handling ready-mades and putting her head sideways as she fingered the materials and considered them generally. And showed remarkably good judgment and taste. Particularly was she attracted by the more diaphanous fabrics, which she said "approached more nearly to those worn by the child-women." And, forgetting her troubles, enjoyed herself thoroughly!

I made her change in a fitting-room, the attendant regarding her boy's underwear with curiosity, and inclined to ask questions till I nipped her in the bud. When properly clothed Faie looked a perfect picture, and as we left the shop and proceeded home, many heads turned to look after her in admiration. I really felt proud to be seen with her, her walk

and every movement were so graceful. And yet all the time Margaret Pomary of the night before was saying severely to Margaret Pomary of to-day, "I'm ashamed of you and your inconsistency!" and the M . . . P . . . of to-day muttering apologetically, "I know; I know; you're quite right but I can't help it; besides, I like doing it, so shut up!"

Before I went to bed that night, after another long talk with my brother, I stole very quietly into Faie's room, and turning on the light watched her as she lay, wrapped in slumber, with masses of golden hair framing her little face. I think if I had still felt any doubt about her, her look of sweet innocence would have dispelled it.

She stirred slightly and looked up at me, drowsily smiling, and then her eyes closed, and I saw she was once more sound asleep. I have many mental pictures of her, but this is the one which I treasure most, and which I shall always retain, while the Lord above keeps my memory green.

CHAPTER IX

Dryad Despondent

WE reached the hotel about three o'clock, and were glad to find there was room for the lot of us. So Faie, being as she said, a little tired, we left her resting with Boris for company, for a couple of hours, while we went straight away in the car to Wilfred's land.

I saw the fallen tree; I saw the steps; the earth newly thrown up around them; and the broken door. Then, first walking twice round the tower, kicking aside the carpet of leaves and satisfying myself they had lain there for ages and there was no other possible way down, we went into the vault itself, taking with us a couple of powerful lamps brought from Town, which made it as light as day. The floor was thickly coated with greyish dust, with splinters and scrap-iron sticking up here and there. On the ground was a fair-sized box, with the lid thrown back; empty, except for a dusty deposit, but comparatively sound owing to being bound with brass instead of iron and having knobs of the same metal to stand on. This was the one Faie's clothes had been in.

On the stone pedestal, or whatever you call it, was a wooden —Wilfred said oaken—slab; also of course covered with a blanket of dust which rose and floated about with every current of air, making us both cough and sneeze; but there was no sign whatever of recent occupation. Then I happened to shine one of the lamps on the wall behind the head of the pedestal, and saw there were remains of rusty nails or hooks as if something had been intended to hang from them. Casting the light down in the narrow space between the head of

the couch and the wall, I saw something cross-shaped half buried in grime, and thin flakes of perished metal. I bent down and picked it up; "What's this?" I asked Wilfred, who took it from me and scrutinised it.

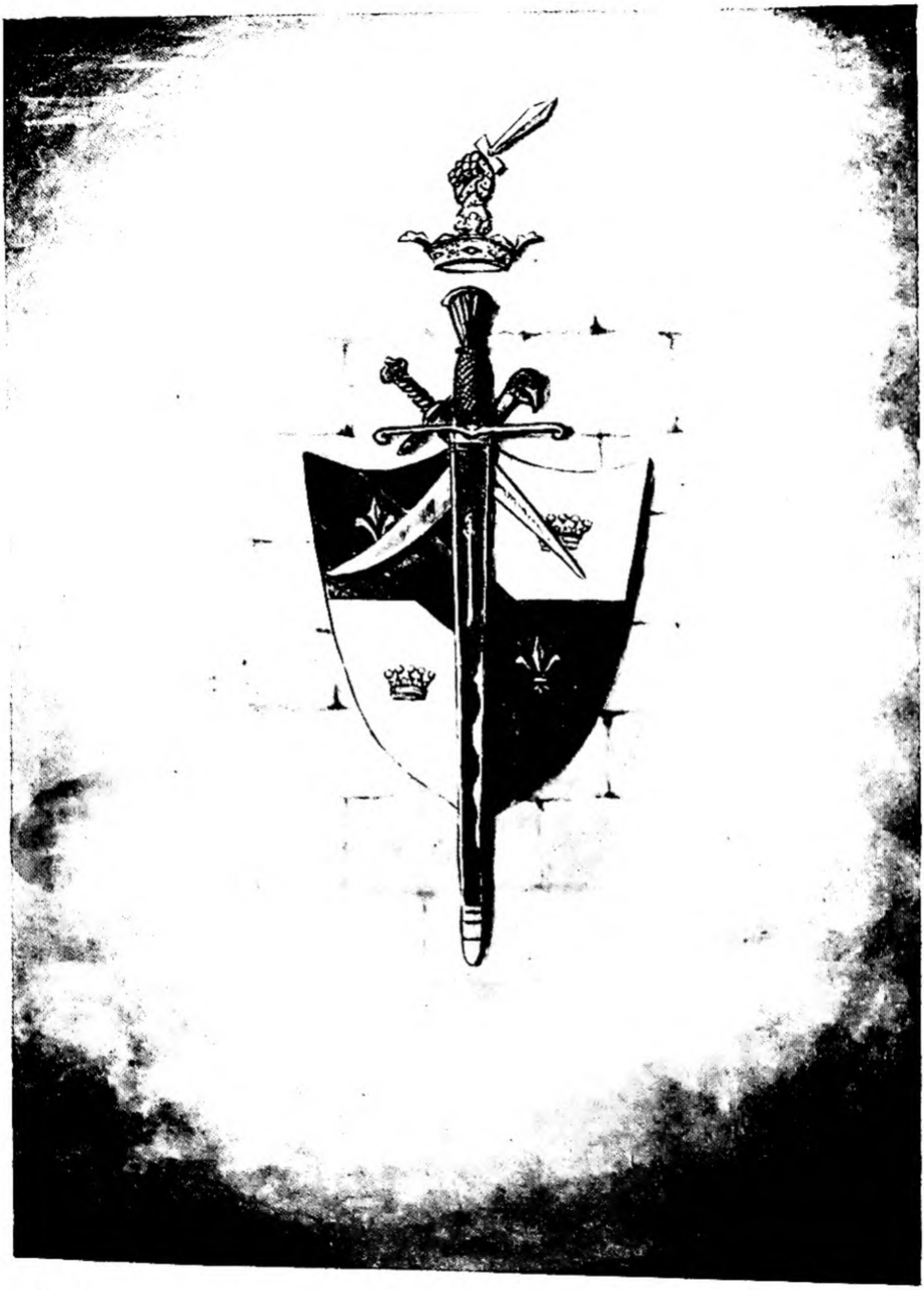
"It's been the handle of a weapon of sorts," he said; "look at this longish piece of iron or steel still in it. It may have been . . . yes! of course! it was a sword! This is the cross-hilt. And," he added, picking up something else, "look, two more handles; this one was part of a dagger; and this one was the haft of something, I don't know what."

"Why!" I cried as I took them from him, "don't you remember? Didn't the priest say he had hung Sir Avril's weapons on the wall?"

"I believe you're right," he said producing the parchments and turning over the leaves. "Yes! listen." And he read out "'on the wall behind her head have we disposed her Father's Blade . . . for centre of a Trophy whereof the twin flanks are . . . his dagger . . . and hunting-knife . . .' These must be the remains of them!"

As I examined them, turning them over in my hands, my eye unwittingly rested on the place where they had hung; and my heart missed a beat, for suddenly a curtain of cloud seemed to form before me, which as I looked, parted in the centre, and rolling aside, revealed as if in a frame, clear and distinct to the view, the trophy of steel and silver flashing with unearthly sheen, bright as it must have shone long long ago when first arranged by the faithful Priest and loyal Seneschal. And the more vividly did the weapons stand out because they appeared to be against a shield-shaped background of armorial bearings emblazoned in rich colouring and surmounted by the Pomary crest. For a brief space I stood dumb and spellbound, and before I could find speech to attract Wilfred's attention, the vision faded; and in its place cold bare masonry was alone to be seen.

"An illusion," I muttered to myself. But was it so?



" A curtain of cloud . . . rolling aside . . . revealed the trophy."
The Dryads

(See p. 130)

For I was by no means familiar with our complete coat-of-arms, yet long after, when I could bring myself to speak of it, my brother said detail and colouring as I described them were correct in every particular.

But at that moment it seemed as though I had been given a sign to sweep away doubt, and force conviction on a mind too prone to reject anything not usual and commonplace. I shivered, and feeling unnerved and faint, went to the door to inhale the fresh air and steady myself.

Meanwhile Wilfred had been occupied with the oaken box or coffer, and stirring the mass of grey fluff and debris within it, "Hullo!" he shouted.

This jarred me into finding speech.

"Don't do that for goodness' sake!" I said acidly—still under the influence of what I had seen. "I can't stand it just now. What is it?"

"There are some discs . . . three . . . four . . . here's another . . . and another!" said he, scrabbling about in it, raising clouds of dust, making us both cough again.

"Let's take it outside, old boy, where it's less choky. We'll tip it out there."

So we carried it out and up the steps between us—it was a fair weight—and turned it upside down; and found two sorts of discs of different sizes; some faintly yellowish and some quite black; twenty-two altogether. "I know what they are," he cried, "they're coins, discoloured with age! Let's see, fifteenth century . . . they must be angels and nobles. But there's no mention of them in the parchments—some kind after-thought on the part of the women who packed the clothes, I suppose. Or perhaps the Priest. However, I can't say what they are till they're cleaned up."

We finally gave the place a thorough search to see if by chance we'd missed anything, and Wilfred once more satisfied himself the walls and altar-things were solid masonry,

and then, looking like sweeps, we came away, drawing the door to as best we could; but, seeing that the place was said to be haunted, we had little fear of intruders.

"And now what?—to quote Clem."

"We'll get back to the hotel with the loot," I decided, "and though I admit that the parchments, the rings, and what we've found now, all hang together, we are still no nearer any real explanation of Faie herself."

"I've thought over that till my head swims," said he, "and I'm just as flummoxed as ever I was."

"So am I; however, don't talk, I don't feel like it. I want to think too."

After we garaged the car, we bought rags and cleaning materials and when Faie had gone to bed (we did not tell her of our recent discoveries) we were busy till the small hours cleaning up the hilts and the coins. The sword and dagger were silver-mounted with worn engraving just showing; the handle of the hunting-knife I discovered to my chagrin after rubbing it till my wrists ached, was of horn; so no wonder I had made little impression on it. We found there were fifteen gold angels, and the other pieces were nobles of silver, nearly every one being in a first-class state of preservation, Wilfred observing they were "worth a packet," and began to talk of shewing them at his Society's next meeting, and then selling them, but I pulled him up short,

"You'll first have to ask Faie!"

"Good gracious! of course! they're hers, aren't they!"

"Well, they're not yours, anyway; no more than the rings she wears; or anything else in the crypt. In fact, I'm not sure that the crypt is morally yours either. Title-deeds or no Title-deeds."

. . . . .

We were rather apprehensive about the new discoveries and the disclosures we should have to make to Faie, and how she would receive them, and were inclined to put off showing

her what we had found. So we said nothing to her that evening, but decided to do so next afternoon.

I did some intensive thinking meanwhile, but came to no conclusion except that every shadow of disbelief in her was utterly dispersed. It was, as Wilfred had said, an incredible situation; yet astounding as it was to me, usually so matter of fact, I had no longer the slightest doubt that the facts related by the Priest and Seneschal referred to her and to her alone. It seemed indisputable that her body, mortal on her father's side, had been for generation after generation, in a state of suspended animation in a trance-like state; while she had inherited from her mother a supernatural nature which accounted for her association in a dream-world with those closely related and calling to her. My brother and I seemed to have been brought to stand face to face with something of tremendous and awe-inspiring import beyond our limited comprehension, whereby centuries long gone by and Beings not of this world, were amazingly linked with the present day. No one would call me imaginative, but the weird manifestation vouchsafed to me in the crypt left a lasting impression that it was of the nature of a message to me that there are even in these prosaic days, mysteries too deep to probe by ordinary reasoning.

What would be the outcome? Would Faie continue to remain what she appeared to be, a being half human, half fairy? Or would she, her earthly part having resumed mortality, live and eventually die in the usual course of nature?

But how would she take it when we put the whole position before her, as obviously we must? Would her quality of self-possession be equal to the terrific disclosure to her of her long absence from the world of humans? Or would she sink under the knowledge that she partly belonged to, and had had her being in, the mediaeval past, and only partly was of our kind?

Were ever two elderly persons confronted with such a bewildering situation?

The next afternoon we took her out in the quiet woods and fields, and though by no means a chatterer, she evinced a knowledge of country lore far beyond what one would have expected from one so young. She was evidently a thorough child of nature, and told us things about birds, beasts and flowers which I, for one, had never heard of nor thought about, but were really of absorbing interest. And she repeated for us her performance in Kensington Gardens, as related by Wilfred, showing the attraction she had for fur and feather.

During our stroll the tower came into view in the distance through an opening in the trees. She saw it with her sharp eyes and stood and looked long at it.

"Would you like to go there?" I asked.

"For the nonce, nay; and yet I feel as if some power would presently draw me thither, I wot not why. For I am still without knowledge why yon tower be all that remaineth of the Castle and Keep. Later, an it please you, we will go, but not now."

So . . . at length in the little hotel sitting-room with its wax fruits on the mantelpiece, and stuffed birds in cases looking glassily down on us, we nerved ourselves to the task before us, and produced, first, the coins, in which she showed merely luke-warm interest, and then the hilts; on seeing which, she exclaimed,

"My father's sword!" Then surveying the rusted piece of blade, "who hath so misused it? Why be it brake in twain? And his dagger! There be naught of it but the hilt! . . . the same with his flaying-knife!"

"Look you," said Wilfred, who amazingly adapted his speech to hers, "they be rusted away by reason of very great age."

"Aforetime," she murmured sadly, "they hung in the tapestried hall of Pommereine. And it were my proud duty to keep them bright and unsullied. They be in poor state now."

Then a thought seemed to strike her, and she went on,

"But, how say you, of great age?"

Wilfred replied gently, "Faie, dear, didst thou take heed on the month and year set on thy father's narrative?"

"Yea, that I did; the month July, the year fourteen hundred and thirty-six."

"But Faie," he said, "other writings bear a later date. Father Godwyn completed his chronicle in the year fourteen hundred and seventy-five, when must he indeed have been stricken in years."

"Fourteen hundred and seventy-five, sayst thou?" she asked wonderingly. "How may that be when it hath not yet arrived? Father Godwyn must surely have been mistook?"

"Dost recollect the name of him who sat on the throne in the fifteenth year of thy life?"

"Truly, it be him now thereon; Henry, the sixth of that name!"

Wilfred's eye sought mine; "And canst say the year wherein the witches came at the last?"

"Of a truth it were that same year fourteen hundred and fifty-two wherein I attained fifteen years."

"Knowest thou the year in which we now live?"

"Be it not the same?" she said doubtfully, and nervously, oppressed by his tone and perhaps a sense of foreboding.

Wilfred looked at me again. And moved by a sudden impulse, I put my arms round her, drawing her close to me, as she hid her face against my breast, whispering "Hold me close, oh sister of Wilfred, for I am filled with dread of I know not what."

"We live in Anno Domini nineteen hundred and thirty-five," said Wilfred slowly.

"What . . . what saith he?" quavered the child looking up at me uncomprehendingly.

"'Tis the year of grace nineteen-thirty-five," I replied, "and the sixth Henry is long since gathered to his fathers,

and others have followed him. Another King it is who wields the sceptre this day in England."

"And I were born . . ." she said hesitatingly, "in fourteen hundred and thirty-seven ! . . . oh tell me . . . for I be all bemused . . . what number of years . . . have passed sin then ?"

"Four hundred and ninety-eight," replied Wilfred solemnly.

She sprang away from me, her face livid and working frenziedly, and with a long tremulous sigh fainted dead away, Wilfred catching her as she fell.

"Why ever did you blurt it out like that ?" I said tartly.

"She asked me—what else could I answer ? Besides, she had to know it some time or other, poor darling," he said compassionately ; and helped to bathe her brow and chafe her cold hands. She revived after a while, and sat up, white as a sheet, pressing her hands to her forehead, then casting them forth despairingly.

"Faie, dear," I began, but could not go on. She stretched out her hands gropingly, and caught our own, holding them tightly.

In a few minutes she whispered feebly, "I prithee let me hear what may be contained in the remainder of the writings, those whereof I am ignorant."

"Why not wait till the morning ?" I said, for it seemed to me that a child of such few years had already had to encounter a more than sufficient shock for one day.

"Nay," she answered, "I will have courage. I will listen even now. For dimly I begin to comprehend that there is more and perhaps worse to come, and that my condition hath an explanation up to now hid from me. Tell me, then, I pray ye, what more there be."

Then, realising that suspense might be worse for her than knowledge, and with her head pillowed on my breast, and both her hands in mine, Wilfred read the conclusion of what the Priest had written, and also Kenelm's contribution.

She only interrupted once—when my brother rather slurred over what occurred after the fight with the witches.

"Read me again, I entreat you, and in clearer and slower diction, those words the witch-woman spake concerning me." So reluctantly he repeated:

> ". . . if Hell shall not have the body of this mongrel spawn of Sprite and Mortal, neither shall Heaven receive her Soul . . . nor Life nor Death shall she attain; nor Mass nor Miserere avail her . . . an this bratling ope her eyesen it shall be but to shed puling tears for that she hovereth, certain only of uncertainty, 'twixt Seen and Unseen."

At which she put her hands to her face . . . and then motioned him to continue to the end; her only comment as Wilfred's voice ceased, being "Dear Father Godwyn and Kellen . . . they greatly loved me. So also did my brave Wolf."

And we three sat in silence for a long time, until she broke it, speaking rather to herself than to us:

"And so thus was I victim of revenge and bitter rancour . . . yet could malignity so long endure? It seemeth so . . . for living . . . my body hath been dead . . . and having been dead yet liveth . . . after," she whispered shudderingly, "such a many years while I lay ignorant of their passage. Thus be it explained why Pommereine be in ruins . . . also why waking, my raiment did melt into dust . . . And yet, that my body did not also, is't not in fulfilment of that the witch did foretell, namely, that I should ope mine eyesen but to weep therewith? Vainly imagining that but a single night had gone by, did I not waken to a world of sad and appalling change, offering little but misery for me? Peradventure my coming hither hath been encompassed by reason that Queen Hyacinth, though loving me for my mother's sake, hath tired of soliciting me to go to her . . .

and hath abandoned me. Or perchance she hath wonderfully set at naught that dreadful malediction and deemed it well to bring it about that cry of hound should summon me, being of a long past Age, to visit a later one to be there fronted by a generation neither knowing nor caring for me nor mine; thereby hoping to ensure my consent to admission into company of Dryads immortal? May it be then, that she hath applied that test to me? And for how long? Or given up hope of me? . . . Oh! . . . I pray that her bowers be not now closed 'gainst me. For an that be so, how wretched my condition . . . and what shall be my end?"

And a tear rolled down her pale cheek.

"Our love," said I gently, "you have won, and possess in full measure.

But she dejectedly shook her head with its crown of silken curls; "Of that and thy pity I may well be assured. But in the course of years, even that, as doth all flesh, will pass with ye away, and then shall I again be left forlorn; my cup of earthly happiness empty . . . alone . . . and friendless . . . 'mong those at variance with all I hold dear."

And refused to be comforted.

We led her to her room, making her lie on her bed, and spoke long and affectionately to her, hoping to lift her out of the slough of despondency in which she was plunged; but all our efforts were vain, her reply being, "thy words should bring ease of mind but cannot; for thy world is not mine nor my mother's world. I dread . . . to remain therein. All be so different."

"Aye," said Wilfred sadly, "but as the years change, so do all mortal things change. Alone doth Nature remain as of yore."

"Alone doth Nature remain as of yore," she repeated slowly and thoughtfully; dwelling upon each word, caressing Boris as he stood by her bed, his eyes fixed upon her.

Then she reached out one hand and pressed Wilfred's;

with the other she took mine and laid it against her soft cheek. And for a long time lay, saying no word, while the shadows lengthened as night fell.

In a while she murmured "Let me rest. I would fain sleep. Therein may come guidance and judgment as to what I should do. But go not far from me, I beg of you, ere I slumber."

"Will you come to my room?" I asked.

"Nay," she replied, "'tis a kind thought, but I will even abide here: only let Boris remain an he will. And pray ye, for further solace, let my father's sword be by me. Also kind Wilfred, who hath been in travail for me, kiss me this once."

For one second their lips met, his arms about her, hers around his neck. Then silently he went out of the room with down-bent head. I stayed with her till she had disrobed and laid her head on her pillow. "Kiss me also, sister of Wilfred," she murmured, and clung to me, whispering, "Thy and thy brother's love shall ever abide in my inmost heart long after thine and his have ceased to beat." And with a faint smile at the corners of her mouth, lay back, until her regular breathing showed me that she slept.

I did not think I could be so weak, but when I left her my eyes were suffused with tears, and I stumbled back to my own room adjoining, with my door and hers ajar.

Wilfred was in the passage and would have spoken. I put my finger to my lips.

"Hush," I said quietly. "Don't wake her." And he tiptoed into his room.

Twice I went softly to see her, and found her slumbering, her hands clasped on the hilt of the weapon. The first time she lay with a troubled wrinkle on her brow: on my second visit I heard her murmuring something, which, though I bent down with my ear close to her lips, I could not clearly distinguish, except the words "Violas" and "Floreal" and "alien no longer." But this time she looked happier,

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and even smiled a little. And so, a little more at ease, I left her with Boris on guard and went to bed, but remained awake until, overcome by fatigue and emotion, I fell asleep.

I may have dozed for an hour or more, when I was wakened, and the manner in which I was roused, and what followed after, my brother must tell; for I cannot speak of it, much less write it.

CHAPTER X

The Major writes 'Finis'

I TOO tried to keep awake that night and Sunday morning; indeed I did not undress but slept uneasily in an armchair with my door open, for my heart was wrung, and I was in a state of wretchedness and foreboding impossible to describe.

It was still dark and I had fallen into a dreamlike state, when I thought Faie, in the little frock I had given her the day we found her, and wearing her sandals, came close to me and pressed her lips to my brow, whispering "God be good to thee, dear Wilfred, now and alway," and softly went out. And then, I think immediately, I was fully roused by Boris pawing me and whining. He was in great disquietude, going to the door then turning back to me, and then again to the door, as if begging me to follow. I sprang up, saying, "What is it, old man?" and as I did so I saw—on the table by my bed—Faie's ring with the armorial bearings; and the sword-hilt.

Filled with apprehension I went along the corridor to her room, the door of which was ajar. Peeping in, I saw by the light in the passage it was empty, the bed unoccupied and the coverings thrown back in tumbled disorder. I knocked at my sister's door, and to my surprise, she appeared at once fully dressed.

"Faie!" I whispered, "gone!"

Moved by common impulse, we followed the fretting hound down the twisty staircase, finding the hotel door unbarred. We went out and then stopped and looked at each other.

"The Crypt!" she muttered.

I nodded. And led by the Great Dane, with our gaze

fixed on the road ahead, watching for the little figure we longingly hoped to see, we took the way thither. It was over two miles to the gate through which the almost obliterated track led to the ruins, and owing to my lameness and mental distress my breath was coming fast as we went through.

As we neared the tower, Margaret stopped and touched my arm, pointing, and I saw in the half-light, a spectral childish form swaying in a graceful dance, arms waving in rhythmic movement, and we could hear the strains of a tender little song on her lips. Boris was about to leap forward, but I laid my hand on his collar, restraining him.

"It is she!" said my sister. "She has lost her reason!" and would have run to her.

"No!" said I, scarcely able to speak, "she may be in her sleep. Let her be for a while."

And so we paused, watching.

Suddenly Faie stood still, then knelt down, and stretching out her arms supplicatingly, cried,

"Oh Queen; thou who like unto Nature changeth not, and to whom time and space are as naught, I come to thee. As was my mother, naked, banished from thy realm and sight, so do I, unclothed and alone, come to thee; having cast off all earthly things save the ring thou gavest her. Pray you receive the child of Sylphiane, whom aforetime thou so loved'st, and let her enter thy blissful groves, to be ever with thee and her true kindred."

There was a silence. Then arose a whispering, not of winds in the trees; and a twittering, not of waking birds; and we saw Faie rise and approach the tower and descend the steps into the vault. At the door she paused—we could just see her face turned towards us, as though listening, or it may have been in farewell—and then . . . we saw her no more.

We went forward slowly and quietly, Boris with drooping head and quivering flanks, until we reached the stone steps, when the sound of her silvery voice arrested us:

"Pray you receive the child of Sylphiane."

Le Brun. See p. 145.

"Beloved Queen, to whom my mother was dear, pray you hearken to my invocation! Here, where as I now know, my body lay for so great a space of time, living yet dead; dead yet living; knowing neither sunlight nor starshine; nor heat nor cold; here do I lie again, ready for thee to take me, an thou wilt, to those gentle arms wherein aforetime and as a tiny child, so oft I nestled."

Then for the space of a minute, again a silence, the while I seemed to sense a fluttering in the air about me. My suspense became unbearable, and I was about to enter the crypt when she resumed ecstatically,

"Oh . . . bliss! . . . I behold thee! . . . thine eyesen tenderly regarding me! . . . thy hand beckoning! And Violas . . . and Floreal . . . advancing with glittering wings of gossamer . . . holding them out towards me . . . oh happiness untold! . . . they place them upon my shoulders! . . . I come! I come gladly . . . . with a tender farewell to those kindly earthlings who of late loved and shed sweet compassion on me. . . . Farewell! . . . and farewell also grey world of sorrow . . . henceforth and with naught of rue, no longer of thee am I, but as was my mother . . . a Dryad! . . . a Dryad! . . . a Dryad of the woods!"

Her joyous voice had been gradually dying away, and with the last faint accents the whispering sounds about us changed to a happy subdued chattering of countless tongues; a sudden brilliant iridescent light streamed for one brief instant from the door of the crypt . . . and then . . . and then . . . a stillness . . . broken by a long mournful howl from Boris.

"Oh, what is it, Wilfred? . . . what is it?" breathed my sister.

"We are going down to see," I replied.

"I daren't go down! . . . I daren't go down! . . . I am afraid!"

"I will go," I said "Short as the time has been, I have

come to love that child as my own, and I will go to her living or dead."

"Don't go, Wilfred! . . . don't go!" she wailed, clinging to me; but I loosened her grasp and descended into the darkness of the crypt. As I passed through the doorway a delicious fragrancy, as of lilies of the valley and wood-violets, greeted me, and in the same moment I was conscious of a Something . . . a Something like a scented wing-tip . . . which brushed softly across my face . . . almost caressingly . . . and was gone!

Having no flash-lamp I fumbled with shaking fingers for my match-case and struck a light. At first, by the flickering flame, I thought I saw Faie recumbent on the stone pedestal, but it was only her little frock—the one I had bought for her—laid out on it. The vault was otherwise empty. An icy chill swept over me; "Margaret! Margaret!" I called hoarsely, "She is not here . . . she has gone!"

My sister, summoning up all her courage, came to me slowly and falteringly, and, leaning against me, sobbed out,

"Wilfred! as I stood on the steps, Something passed me! I felt it touch me!"

"Yes," I said, "I felt it too," and struck another match; and then another—and looked all round the stone couch, but only masonry met the eye. And once more my dog, which had followed us in, threw back his massive head, and gave another terrible and prolonged heart-break howl.

With a bursting heart I took up the dress, handing it to Margaret, who took it almost mechanically.

"Take me away, Wilfred; take me away," she said shuddering. "I can't bear it—take me away."

There seemed no reason for remaining, so leading her, I groped my way to the door. My sister, with the frock limply hanging from her arm, was in a state so bordering on utter collapse that, utterly despondent and awe-struck as I was, I had to support her and give her all my attention, until with

an effort she shook off the weakness and whispered almost inaudibly, "Let us go."

Thrice did I have to re-enter the crypt before Boris, usually so obedient, could be induced to quit it and follow me, and when he did so, it was with obvious reluctance, and with many a halt to turn and look back, whining pitifully, at the tower.

Slowly and with lagging footsteps, our sight dim with tears, we retraced our way to the village. Only once did we speak, and then it was I who murmured, scarcely able to pronounce the words,

"She came to me in farewell as I half slept, and left me her father's ring. Also his sword."

"Also to me she came," answered my sister in the same hushed tone; "that was why you found me dressed. Something roused me. I went to her room and she was not there. . . . And . . . Heaven forgive me . . . at first . . . I doubted her . . . how could I? . . . I shall never, never forgive myself."

We regained the hotel and sought the room that had been hers, and there we found all the garments Margaret had bought for her; the clothing carefully folded in the chest-of-drawers; the shoes in a corner side by side. Her night-gown lay on the bed; the impress of her head still on the pillow. Her sandals were never found. Nor the key of the vault and the chain it hung on; these last only seen, and then lost, by Clement.

"Don't leave me, Wilfred, I am frightened; stay with me till the night has gone," begged Margaret tearfully. So hand in hand, Boris unceasingly wandering dejectedly from room to room and to stair-head, we sat together engrossed in our sad thoughts till the Church bell rang for early Service, no word passing between us save once, when she asked me in hushed accents,

"Did you notice something unusual in the vault and pedestal?"

"Only what you saw yourself?"
"There was not a speck of dust. All was quite clear of it."

. . . . .

I went alone to the vault during the morning, with a flash-lamp, and found this was indeed true. Except for the spent matches I had thrown down, the place was spotless. Of the thick coating of grime of those few hours back, there was not a trace. It was as if invisible elfin hands had swept and garnished the whole crypt, and with a sense of self-reproach I retrieved the burnt-out matches, which seemed to desecrate a Shrine, for me ever to be sacred.

. . . . .

Thus within the confines of one short week did our sweet visitor come . . . and go . . . back to the Glades of Faerie where she must always have rightfully belonged, and to which she had never while on earth been entirely a stranger.

I wear the ring always. I have preserved the parchments, and other relics. None but those who knew of their existence from the first have seen them. Nor till now have I divulged to others any part of what is here written. I only do so now, because the events I have detailed have tried me . . . and . . . in case . . . I think a record should remain.

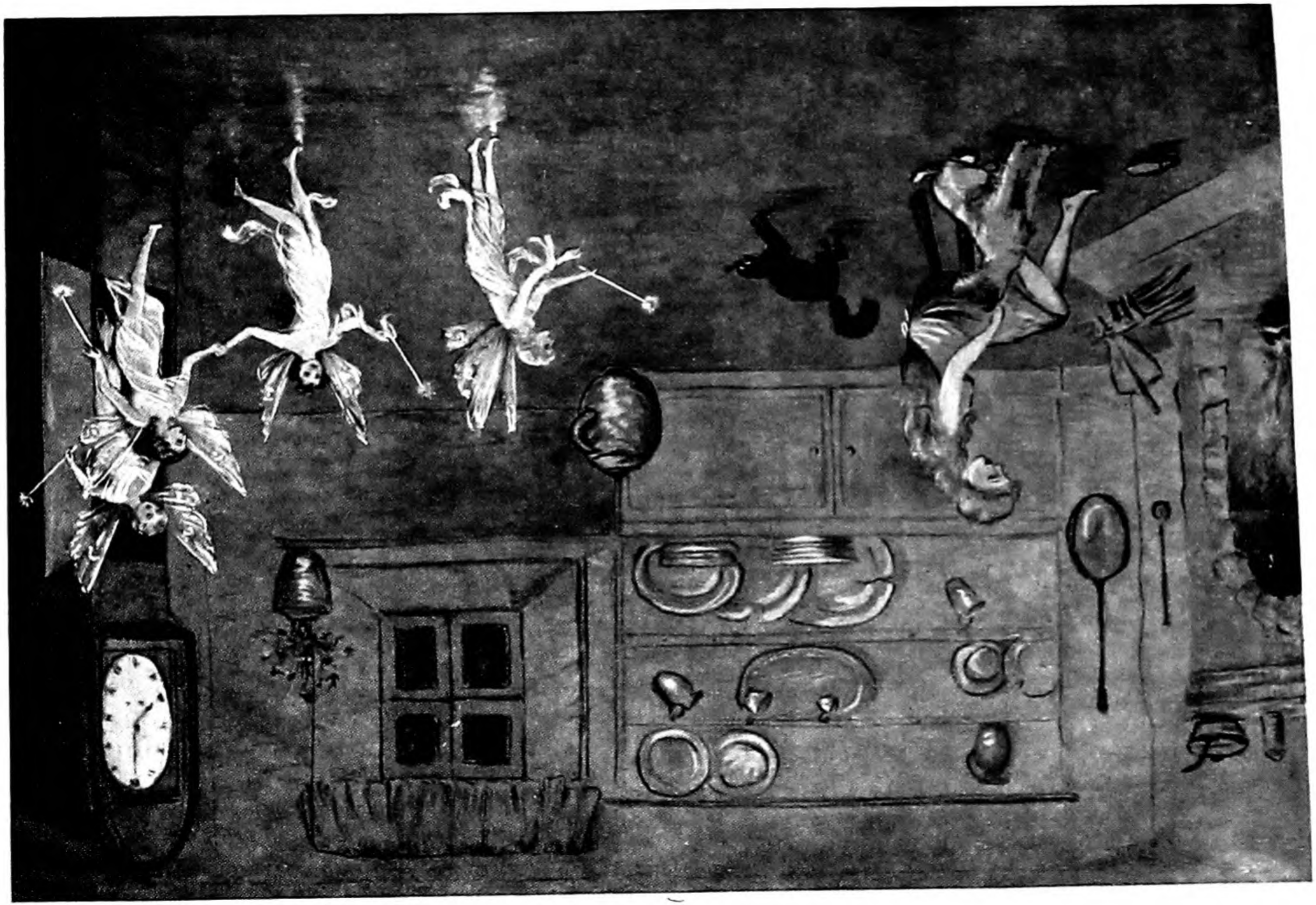
The house is a-building round the tower and crypt beneath. And I look forward to living . . . and dying . . . there; for I have an unshaken conviction that amid the surrounding woods must lurk my little Dryad love, no longer lonely but supremely happy, and maybe watching me . . . and being nigh, may in my dreams even come to me. Foolish fancies, perhaps, but comforting. And Margaret, gentler and less downright than formerly, shares them, cherishing the same hope that from time to time we may behold again the graceful Sprite who flashed across our ken, and then took flight from a world in which she found trials so many, and joys so few.

I can write no more. . . .

FINIS

From the *Kensington Watchman*, 12 July, 1935.

At West London Police Court yesterday Levi Brutus Jackson was committed for trial on charges of larceny. A minor one, not proceeded with, was in respect of working a pony in an unfit state. The magistrate, addressing the prosecuting solicitor, said he had learnt with pleasure that Major Pomary, V.C., had seen fit to purchase the animal in question, and would maintain it for life, unworked, on his recently acquired estate at Pommereine Hall, Devon.



RAMSHACKLE KEEP

OR

VIRTUE REWARDED AND VICE VERSA

THE TRUE STORY

OF

CINDERELLA

(as related to the Author by a chap who knew a man who heard it from a fellow who got it from a cousin of his great-grandfather, whose aged nurse had been told it by—oh well; this narrative so far as authenticity is concerned is IT; and the writer can be quoted as saying so).

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RAMSHACKLE KEEP

CHAPTER I

How it all Began

CINDERELLA was peeling potatoes. . . .

Bother! that's rather a fault of mine, to commence in the middle instead of at the beginning. For of course you will want to know all about her and her family, and where they lived and so forth. So I'll hark back a bit.

It's quite likely I shall only be telling some of you things you knew about long ago. Still, if you have been nicely brought up, you will politely say, "Oh no! Not at all, it's quite new to me!"

However, I'll chance it. There is more than one version, more or less inaccurate, of this story, but as this is going to be the only true and reliable one, here goes.

Her father now. He was Baron Bustup; and his letters, circulars and Income Tax papers were so addressed to him; sometimes with Mr. in front, and Esquire after it, making him look so much more important, don't you think? He was always pretty hard up, and owed money to the butcher, the milkman, the tailor and goodness knows whom else. What he didn't know about County Court summonses wasn't worth knowing. If you doubt all this, you watch carefully the next time you see the pantomime written round him and his domestic circle. And sooner or later I bet you will see the Sheriff's Officer or the local Court Bailiff coming in and shifting the furniture and generally making things unpleasant for the family.

Ramshackle Keep

The Baron was, I understand, a widower, and I can't tell you anything about the Baroness, reliable authorities not providing anything in the way of her autobiography. He had three children, all daughters; Cinderella being the youngest and aged, I believe, about nineteen. And they all lived in an old castle called Ramshackle Keep. Very picturesque, with a moat and a drawbridge (which didn't work) but, my word! how damp and draughty! Also the roof leaked. Many of the windows were broken and few of the doors fitted—that's why the two elder sisters' noses, normally inflamed, were tinged with blue. Cinderella felt the cold too, but hers always retained its natural colour.

The eldest daughter was so squat and stout that she couldn't bend in the middle, and her fat bulgy countenance had about the same amount of animated expression as the bottom of a jam-pot. She was short enough to be a convenient height for peeping through key-holes, a habit of hers which perhaps accounted for her red eyelids. The other was thin as a lath and so tall she could almost look through the first-floor windows—which naturally inclined her to look down on everybody. And her face, if it could be called a face at all, was acidulated enough to turn milk sour. Later on you will see a picture of her in one of her less reposeful moments.

As for their characters and dispositions; well, the less said about them the better. You see, they were not only contemptuous of their father, but also thoroughly selfish, overbearing, and lazy; rude to each other, and both, often with a slap or pinch, cruelly rounded on poor Cinderella, whom they hated, and bullied out of pure cussedness.

The neighbours sometimes referred to these two dreadful bits of work as "The Awful Examples"—which was right; they were no oil-paintings—but more often as "The Wotisits." I've never heard their real Christian names—they signed their census papers "Gwladysse" and "Maiebelle", spelling them that way out of pure swank—but the Baron, for

whom they didn't care a snap of the fingers, had his own designations for these holy, or unholy, terrors, and in his own mind nick-named the tall one the "Skyscraper" and the other "The Blimp". But wouldn't dare to let them know it.

And that was the long and short of it so far as they were concerned. And those names will do for me.

They both spent a good deal of their time composing soppy letters to strangers, beginning something like this; "Dear Friend; I am a widow with sixteen children, and all we've had to eat since last Thursday fortnight was half a dog-biscuit, between us"; which often elicited in reply a postal order, or some discarded clothes or false teeth, by selling which they made a little money; and this they blued partly on dress and partly on beauty treatments, or on patent medicines advertised to produce flesh in the one case and to reduce it in the other; but didn't.

And among other nasty habits, they painted their lips and finger-nails brilliant crimson; powdered their faces in public, and chewed gum. Things Simply Not Done by nice people. Altogether an unpleasant pair and I'm glad they were no friends of mine.

I'd rather not talk about them if you don't mind. Let us consider their youngest sister instead.

Cinderella! Oh, she was quite different. She was sweet-natured and a pet. Never quarrelled. Never answered back. Pretty she was too, with soft appealing eyes, curly silken hair, and long eyebrows unplucked and still in full bloom on each side of her dainty little nose.

A little angel. Just like you used to be. M'yes?

Where was I? Oh yes! Now her two sisters treated her as if she were no better than a skivvy, and unpaid at that, and put upon her in every way. Any tiresome or dreary task was bunged on to her. It was she who lit the fires, made the beds, cooked breakfast, lunch and dinner, cleared away and washed

up ; while if anything went wrong they would say it was all her fault. If you have got the impression that they were horrid to her, each other, Daddy, and everyone else, you're right.

And Cinderella never had a really new dress ; and because she would have scorned to write begging letters, or ask anyone for charity, she had to do what she could with her sisters' cast-offs, and as they wore their clothes into holes, you can understand what a job she had in patching perforations and threadbare places. Both she and the materials had a thin time, what ? As for her stockings, they had been darned so often there was precious little left of the originals.

And now she was in the kitchen all by herself, with an apron on, made out of an old roller-towel, busy with the spuds. . . . There I go again ! much too fast ; for why was she all alone ? And where were the rest of the family ?

Well ; you see it was like this.

The King and Queen of that country—(What ? where was it ? Oh ! never mind where ; look for it in the atlas and don't ask silly questions)—had only one child, a son who was the apple of their eyes, and he was indeed a pippin. A very fine young feller-me-lad of four and twenty years of age, tall, and a jolly good-looking chap of charming manner and lovable disposition. Naturally he was a universal favourite. His name ? how interruptious you are ! Don't be in such a hurry. I was just going to tell you. As a matter of fact he had about fourteen, but I am not going to use them all every time I mention him. The one generally adopted was Hildebrand, so let's pick on that. A nice name, though rather a mouthful, so when they " shortened " him, his parents shortened that as well and called him Hildy.

No, not Hilda, stupid ! H-i-l-d-y, Hildy.

Now, their Majesties were very keen on his marrying a Princess, or at least someone, even if not of royal blood, possessing a sizeable banking account. The King was par-

ticularly anxious on that point because the Queen kept the cheque book. Incidentally she also kept him very short of pocket money, he being rather careless in money matters; and his idea was, that if his daughter-in-law, when acquired, should turn out to be rich and generous he might be able now and then to touch her for a little petty cash to go on with without his wife knowing.

But their solitary chick so far did not seem to care for any of the pretty ladies of the Court—and there were plenty—and was all for the open air and sports of every kind, and so, though polite to the opposite sex, he seldom looked at them twice. As for marrying one of them, the thought never entered his mind. This worried the old birds a lot.

One day, not long before this story begins, when it was getting on for Christmas, the King said to the Queen:

"I wish to goodness the young 'un would hitch up with someone and settle down. It's time he did and had sons of his own. It gives me the heeby-jeebies to think some day the Crown may go to Cousin George, who looks, and is, worse than a wet Monday in Glasgow. We really must find a nice gel for Hildy."

"Not a hope!" replied the Queen. "I've done all I can in that way; there ain't a petticoat for miles and miles that I have not had to tea and waved at him—with the girl inside it, I mean. And every time he simply did the muffins and fancy cakes act—and very prettily too—and talked to her about the weather, and that's all there was to it."

"Can't understand it," said the King, "at his age I was er . . . er . . ."

"Yes? You what?" asked she with a frosty sort of glitter in her eye.

"H'm; forget what I was going to say," replied he remembering just in time that references to his pre-marriage days were not always favourably received. "However, supposing we were to . . ."

"I thought of that too," interjected his Consort, "but it won't do. But I'll tell you what *my* idea is."

"What?" asked the King.

"I think it would be a good plan if we gave a slap-up Costume Ball—fancy dress optional—and sent invitations to all the crowned heads, presidents, dictators, and millionaires we can think of. The whole boiling in fact; and tactfully hint that they should bring all their female relations with them. . . ."

"Don't think much of that," interrupted the King. "Look at the Duke of Syringa, f'rinstance; he has a widowed mother and two elderly aunts, who have to be seen to be believed; and I don't see why we should supply them with a Ball Supper at a guinea a head—champagne extra, dash it! As for their suiting Hildy or us, nothing doing."

"I do wish you'd let me finish speaking! I was going to add 'under the age of twenty-five.'"

"It seems like putting up Hildy for a sort of exhibition with a view to matrimony, don't it?"

"Well, what if it is? Let them think, if they want to, we *are* trying to get him off. We are, aren't we? We're a good deal better than they are, and some of them would jump for joy if Hildy were to say 'Will you?' to one of their family. However, if you know a better 'ole, go to it. Do you?"

"Well—er—no; I don't think I do," replied his Majesty.

"Very well then, we'll do it," she said decisively.

The King on the whole rather liked the idea; for if he could dodge his better four-fifths he himself wasn't at all averse to sitting out on the top stairs at a dance. So he said, "Right ho! How do we go from here?"

CHAPTER II

Discussions and Repercussions

THEY sat down and talked over ways and means all that day, and the next, and the next, and every wet afternoon after that for about a month, and sometimes the Queen would wake him up in the small hours to tell him something she had just thought of. The upshot was that they formed a committee of themselves, the Lord Chancellor, the ditto Chamberlain, the heads of the War Office and the Admiralty, and the manager of the Catering Department of Swadger & Hadgley's; and preliminaries were arranged, the date fixed, and in due time the invitations were sent out, printed on cards the size of the front gate, all beginning:

"To all to whom these Presents shall come; welcome; R.S.V.P." (or 'E. and O.E.'—I forget which).

And one of them was duly pushed under the door at Ramshackle Keep, causing great excitement.

The Wotisits immediately began to discuss what they should wear; while their Father wondered if he could scrounge from someone who didn't know him too well, some fit-out suitable for the occasion.

Then a thought struck him.

"The question is, how are we going to get there?" he asked.

And this was a poser; because all this happened in the dear dead days beyond recall, when, though you will hardly

believe it, a respectable duck could take a portly waddle along the road of an evening without being flattened out, or hurtled into the next county, by a Skunkerino murder-car. And, you see, there was only one conveyance in the village nearby, and that was an antiquated post-chaise, originally for four horses and a postillion, belonging to Gubbins the blacksmith, who also owned Bucephalus, who pulled it.

Bucephalus was a bay-coloured, wall-eyed plough-horse, of introspective disposition, given to brooding over abstruse problems like the Howness of the Whereby, or the Anyhow of the Incomprehensible, and when concentrating on these questions it was often necessary, if his services were required, to remind him of the stern facts of life by letting off a squib close to his hinterland. So it was to this combination that the Blimp alluded when she said petulantly:

"I suppose we shall have to hire the beastly old coach?"

"I don't fancy it much," said the Baron. "The last time I used it was to go to the Oddfellows' dinner; there were no cushions, the bottom and seat fell out just before I got there, and as both doors were jammed I had to walk inside it the rest of the way, and crawl out from underneath when I arrived. I bet I looked the Oddest Fellow of the whole crowd. Besides, it has never been the same since it was used for the Sunday-school Treat two years ago. The kids practically wrecked it. When I saw it last week it was functioning as a fowl-house. Also, don't forget it only holds two."

"Well, what do you suggest?" enquired the Skyscraper.

"Blessed if I know," he replied gloomily after thinking hard. "I suppose it will have to be made do. Perhaps it could be scrubbed out a bit; but it's a bit awkward because I have owed Gubbins one pound three and fourpence for 'account rendered' since the year dot. Of course, there is the old bathchair with the broken springs which the Vicar might perhaps lend me—if I can get someone to push it."

"Yes, I don't think!" said the Blimp, "and if one of us is going to make shift with that, it won't be me."

"Nor me," said the Skyscraper.

"Well, dash it!" remarked the Baron, "are we all going to play sardines-in-a-tin in the chaise? How do you expect me to drive? No, you two girls must toss for it. Heads, chaise; tails, bath-chair."

"Toss nothing!" chorused both sisters together, the Blimp adding, "we'll go inside, and you can ride horseback, or on the roof, and drive from there. And you can toss with yourself which."

You see? I told you they were horrid, didn't I? I wonder what would happen to you if you spoke to father or mother, or one of your aunts, like that! It's a pity that when they were young, and impressionable, they didn't get more of the flat side of the hairbrush. However, for the sake of peace, the Baron—I do think he was rather a rabbit—gave in, muttering something about Bucephalus being so barrel-shaped in the middle, while he (the Baron) ran rather short in the leg; and did they suppose he was going to ride sideways?

Then, as he was very fond of his youngest daughter, he said:

"What about Cinders?" (They all called her that, so I am going to, too.)

"Well! What about her?" queried the Skyscraper nastily.

"Don't you see?" said he, "that will make four of us."

"Oh, no it won't!" said the Blimp. "Cinders? I should smile! You don't suppose she is included in the invite, do you?"

"Well, it says on the card, me, 'and the Misses' and she's one of the Misses, ain't she?"

"Yes," said the Blimp, "and she is going to miss this

show, so there. She is too young to stay out late for one thing, and for another, she has no manners, besides having nothing to go in, or anything to make a frock of."

"What's wrong with her manners?" he mumbled. "She's growing up, and it's time she came out; and she doesn't get much fun."

"Fun?" chimed in the Skyscraper. "What's she got to do with fun? She's done very well without it so far. Let her go on doing it. I never heard anything so silly—putting ideas into her head! Besides, if you think we are going to take a little mouldy kitchenmaid with us, you've another guess coming, and then some. Why; don't you understand that even if she had anything to make a dress of, she would be far too busy with ours to have time to do it? And she's got to stay at home to mind the family plate."

"There isn't any," said their father.

"Yes, there is—there's the plated teapot and toast-rack."

"Anyway," interrupted the Blimp snappily, "she AIN'T GOING. Not while I have my strength. It's bad enough for my chances of getting off with the Prince, or anyone else, to have to be seen in the same room with a sister looking like a hop-pole. . . ."

"Hop-pole?" screamed the Skyscraper, resenting this allusion to herself, and almost foaming at the mouth. "Hop-pole? Gercher! What about me being seen with you, you measly little dumpling you?"

Then there was a high old ruction, both shouting at once with all the power of their lungs and saying things I won't repeat.

Eventually, Cinders, who had come in to see what the row was about, managed to say in a still small voice, trying to smooth over things,

"Never mind; it doesn't matter; I don't really want to go." (This was not true, but it shows what a nice mind she

had.) " And afterwards, Father, you will tell me all about it, won't you ? "

She was rather a dear, wasn't she ? But I dislike the Wotisits so intensely that if I'd been her, I'd have poisoned their early morning tea.

CHAPTER III

The Clock takes a Hand

AND this was the night of the ball; and the others had all gone off; the Skyscraper calling her weird get-up (designed by herself) "Incroyable" and looking like the Monument on a hike; the Blimp as a "Moss-Rose"—Gosh! —but resembling a tomato which had had bad news from home; and the Baron in the uniform of the Royal Standbacks in the time of King Hezekiah. Thus it was that Cinders, as I have told you before more than once—so I suppose it has soaked in —was peeling potatoes in front of what was left of the kitchen fire, all alone except for her pets, the wire-haired terrier called "Scraps", and "Pusskin" the family cat, a comfort-loving feline of selfish disposition. She loved both of them, and they adored her as much as they disliked her sisters. I may mention here that Scraps, having sampled the Wotisits' ankles at odd times, had decided that an old slipper was not only more piquant to the taste, but also less likely to disagree.

And, as she peeled and scraped, and dug out the eyes of the taters, every now and then she would give a little sniff, and a tear would roll down her soft cheek and dimpled chin; and then she would wipe her eyes on a corner of her apron, and Scraps would nuzzle his head on her lap and gaze up at her with a sort of "There! there! little girl" look in his wist-ful brown eyes; and she would stroke his head and say "You do love me, don't you, Scraps?" and he would wag his stubby tail right to left, meaning "Yes! indeed I do, better than the meatiest bone." (Whereas left to right, or up and down,

would have meant something quite different.) Pusskin, too, would arch her back and unfurl her tail, rubbing herself against Cinders on the other side, with a cheerful purr—but, I'm afraid, hoping warm milk would eventuate from these attentions.

But, in spite of these attempts at comfort, Cinders, who had never been to a dance in her life, and had been aching to go to this one, still went on sniffing at intervals and trying to smile at her pals at the same time.

Now, you young people who have not heard this tale before, listen! for this is where you get ready to gasp "Ooh!" and grab each other by the arm, or hair, whichever comes handiest.

The tall grandfather clock opposite the fireplace had just made the clicky sound that it did when it was thinking of striking, and Cinders had finished peeling the murphies and had put them away in the pantry ready for to-morrow, and was wondering if she should do the onions. Having decided that her eyes had been watering quite enough as it was, and they—I mean the onions—would keep till the morning, she had just sat down despondently, in front of the dying fire, with her hand on Scraps' head, when she heard a noise!

Pusskin heard it too and stopped in the middle of her evening toilette, with one paw in the air, and her whole attitude best represented by the sign ? meaning "Whatever was that? Mice?"

Scraps also heard it and cocked the only ear left to him after a difference of opinion he had had a little time back with a dog belonging to the butcher; but he didn't growl but just looked mildly interested.

Then Cinders heard the noise again.

Not a frightening noise; a sort of twittering noise. A whispering noise. A noise of swishy skirts. A noise like tiny tinkling bells in the distance. All sounding rather pleasant.

And believe me, or believe me not, as the clock struck eight, the door of it opened and out of its innards tripped some delightful tiny little elves in dresses shimmering all over and carrying wands tipped with stars. How they had all managed to cram into so small a space without cracking their wings, or stopping the pendulum, or setting fire to anything, beats me! However, out they popped, one by one, until there were eleven of them, all chattering, and smiling ever so sweetly at Cinders, as they gathered round her in her patched workaday dress and tattered apron.

And they began to skip about to lively music coming from I don't know where.

"Suffering fishcakes!" ejaculated Pusskin, "what is all this?"

"Blow me!" said Scraps, who inclined to be slangy when excited. "Is this some cabaret show broke loose?"

Now if Cinders had sprung to her feet, astounded, when she saw the fairies, what do you think her feelings were when she heard her dumb pets breaking out all of a sudden into human speech? She was utterly bewildered and trying to look three ways at once.

And so would you if you had been her.

However, she made an attempt to recover her self-control and gulped, and tried to say to her visitors, "To what do I owe the honour of this visit?" or words to that effect, but only got so far as something which sounded like "Wok . . . quok?" finishing with a snort of amazement.

The little fairies only laughed happily and pointed past her at the clock; and Cinders turned and saw, emerging from the door, a most handsome and regal-looking lady. Much more magnificent than the others; wearing a gown cut on the basque and ruched down the back with rainbow pompoms, and . . . and . . . oh well! you must imagine the rest—I was never good at describing dresses—and with new threepenny bits stuck all over her—or that is what Cinders thought

they were, but as any sharp girl will guess, they were really sequins; with a pair of lovely gossamer wings on her shoulders, and a glorious shining crown on her head. With her came a twelfth little fairy carrying a long wand tipped with swansdown—very chic. All the elves made obeisance to her as she glided—or is it glode?—rather than walked up to Cinders, who by now was breathing so hard she whistled through her nose.

The great lady put her arm round her and kissed her affectionately, and with a dainty little handkerchief, which appeared to be made out of a rose-petal, gently dabbed Cinders' eyes—still wet with teardrops.

"Do you know who I am, dear Cinderella?" asked she.

"Nunc I" gasped Cinders, positively hiccoughing with excitement.

"Can't you guess, my dear?"

"Is you—I mean are it—the Queen?"

"Well, yes," she replied. "I am the Queen, but not the sort you mean. I am the Queen of queens—the fairy Queen, and these sprites are my Ladies-in-Waiting. They live behind the clock-face and are the Elves of the Hours. And though minute, are by no means second-rate, I assure you," adding casually, "I am also, as it happens, your Godmother."

"Wuk! your Madmother, I mean my Gojesty?" And though she tried to suppress it, her voice died away in a squeak.

"Yes, indeed dear," said her Godmother.

"Bu—bu—but I've never heard of you before!" gasped Cinders.

"No, I know, and it is my fault that you have not seen me sooner; but I wanted to make sure first."

"Sure of what?" asked Cinders more coherently. "Didn't you know where I lived?"

"Yes I did; but I wanted to make quite certain, by testing you in every way, that you deserved the good fortune which I will see that you get."

Cinders said to herself, "She is pulling my leg," and then out loud "Oh! you're making fun of me, aren't you? I have never had any good fortune yet; nor expected it, and I don't see where it is coming from."

And even Scraps added "Good fortune! No fear! Don't make me laugh!"

"No, Cinderella!" the beautiful lady replied, "I am not deceiving you. I have seen how your two sisters—thank goodness I am not their Godmother too—have treated you, and how patient you have been, and I waited until to-night to come to you."

"Why to-night?"

"Why, because it is the night of the Royal Ball, isn't it?"

"Ye-es but . . ."

"You don't see what that has to do with it? Well, it has; a lot. Listen! Be prepared for a wonderful surprise. YOU ARE GOING TO THE BALL YOURSELF!"

CHAPTER IV

Dressmaking Extraordinary

"WHARK?" almost screamed Cinders, becoming flabbergasted again.

"Yes," said the Fairy Queen, "and it's true! And what I say, goes."

"Wha—wha—what, like this?" stuttered Cinders, looking at her old frock and apron with bits of potato-peel sticking to it here and there.

"No, certainly not, not in those clothes. Much nicer ones."

"But where am I to get them? The shops are all shut by now. And anyway I've no money."

"I will provide them. I don't need shops. My elves will supply all the upholstery necessary; and if you don't like it when you see it, say so, and I will alter things any way you like," replied the Queen, kissing her again.

"But Godmother, dear Godmother, how can I get there? There is nothing to go in, except the old wheelbarrow in the yard."

"Leave all that to me, Cinders; you shall have your own coach and horses. Yes, and a footman, and a trumpeter riding in front to clear the way."

"What! . . . Me? . . . Oh, I am dreaming. I shall wake up in a minute," said Cinders with a catch in her breath.

"Darling Cinderella, you are not dreaming. Trust me. All I have said will come true. But remember this. There is one condition. I shall only give you all these delights until the

clock strikes twelve. So be careful that by then you are on the way home again or you will become at once just as you are now, old dress and apron and all. So you must promise to time the watch—which I will lend you—and watch the time."

"But, Godmother! thanking you ever so much all the same, I don't know how to behave in grand society. I don't even know how to curtsey and I don't know any dance steps. People will only laugh at me."

"No indeed they won't," answered her Godmother, "all that knowledge I will give you. Have no fear, for you will be the admiration of all beholders and the success of the evening. Why! even if you were to make any mistakes, anything of that sort is forgiven to beauty; and you are a beauty, my dear, both in looks and in mind, and will do me credit in every way. I shall be very proud of you; but remember! TWELVE O'CLOCK finishes it."

By this time Cinders didn't know if she was on her head or her heels—everything seemed so extraordinary and wonderful. But 'dithery' didn't describe her feelings when the Fairy Queen, having taken her beautiful wand from her attendant sprite, gently touched Cinders' forehead with it, letting the swansdown tip travel lightly down to her knees, with the words "All change!"

And what next?

Why! there was a blinding flash; away went the shabby old gown and ragged apron—where to? There you go again; how do I know?—and in place of them Cinders stood in a dream of a glittery dance-frock; the corsage (if that is the right word for the top end) studded with diamonds and sapphires; and in a pair of silk stockings which must have cost at least fifteen and eleven three farthings; and her lovely curly hair gleaming under a sparkling ta-ra-ra. A perfectly splendiferous fitout.

No wonder Scraps and Pusskin both spluttered

"Pswyllch!" and fell over backwards with their paws waving feebly in the air, suffering from shock.

Then one of the Elves held up a mirror, and Cinders looked in it and exclaimed in astonished delight "Oh! this is never me!" And then took another peep, and said "Oh!" again, in a different tone, for she saw there was something wrong.

Have you guessed what it was? No? How dull you are! Why, she noticed all this magnificence stopped at her ankles; for on her feet still remained her dreadful old house-shoes, trodden down at heel, and all scratches and holes.

Her Godmother, following her gaze, observed "No! I hadn't forgotten!" and beckoned to one of the little fairies, who came forward with a sky-blue velvet cushion, and on it, side by side, flashing red, purple, and green fire, were two darling little crystal slippers.

Cinders said "Oh!" again, but this time a little doubtfully, knowing she had a tiny but irritating blister on her right heel, and afraid solid glass would do it a bit of no good.

But the little elf knelt down before her, and put Cinders' feet, one after the other, on the cushion, and gently took off the old ruins, and put on the glass slippers. And lo! they went on as easy as easy, like chamois leather, and the blister never even whimpered! Neither 'hen nor the whole evening.

So there she was, a vision of radiant beauty from top to toe, looking lovely.

"Satisfied?" enquired the Queen.

"Oh, yes! yes! yes indeed, dear Godmother!" breathed Cinders.

And then all of a sudden her eyes danced and she gave a merry little laugh.

"What amuses you?" asked her Godmother, smiling also.

"I'm thinking of Father's and my sisters' faces when they see me like this; but oh dear! whatever will they say, and how shall I explain?"

"Don't trouble your little head about that," replied the fairy, "I'll see to it that they won't know who you are; and if you obey my warning about twelve o'clock, you will be back in plenty of time to be in bed when they return, and they'll never know you were at the Ball too. But we're wasting time. So now for the Coach and Horses!"—and again the magic wand was waved, this time towards the door with a word like "Taxi!"

Immediately was heard a "Toot-toot" and a nice klop-kloppy sound; then a double knock at the door, which was flung open by a footman in gorgeous crimson livery with white knee-breeches; and there, crowded into the back-yard, bang in front of the dustbin (where Pusskin sometimes, if lucky, found a little something for lunch), was standing a splendid glittering glass coach, with six grey ponies tossing their heads and champing their bits; and a coachman in a white wig and cocked hat, sitting on the box, holding the reins.

Now, there are some people who will tell you that the coach was evolved from a pumpkin by the fairy, who also transformed rats or mice into ponies, and lizards or something or other into the coachman and footman. Don't you believe them. They're having you on, as you can see for yourselves if you think a little. For instance, who grows pumpkins in the depth of Winter? So there you are, and perhaps you'll take my word for it another time. Yes, and ask them who they're getting at.

Well—let's get on.

The Footman bowed low, saying:

"Will your Ladyship be pleased to enter the carriage?"

And this, Cinders, more or less dazed, was about to do when there was a slight interruption.

Dressmaking Extraordinary

Up to this, Scraps had for some time merely sat on his back-end, panting, with his tongue out, and pensively scratching himself at intervals; but when he saw his dear mistress with her escort about to leave without taking him too, he interjected:

"Hi! what about me and my lady friend here?" pointing at Pusskin. "Aren't we in on this binge?"

Cinders by now had become so used to marvellous happenings that nothing seemed to surprise her any more; it seemed quite natural that Scraps should talk like that, so she just stopped short, and looked enquiringly, first at him and then at her Godmother, as if to say "Yes, what about it?"

"Well," said the Fairy Queen to Scraps, "I suppose I CAN manage it, but you and Pusskin will both have to be properly dressed. Let's see," she went on, thoughtfully pinching her chin with her finger and thumb, "How can it be done? Oh! I know! Pusskin can go as Puss-in-Boots, and you, Scraps, as the Dog-Star."

"Puss-in-Boots nothing! Poussin-tum[1] for this kitten," said Pusskin. "Look here, you leave me at home with a plate of chicken, and you can keep your old fancy kick-ups. I'm a domesticated animal, I am, and I'd rather stop in, especially at this time of the year, when tail-tip temperature drops to zero. Besides, I see that coach has glass sides and front; and it's sure to be chilly, and it wouldn't surprise me to find a nasty draught whiffling about inside it."

"Very well then," said the Fairy Queen, but not looking over pleased, "you shall have what you prefer; but don't gollop it down in a hurry or you'll be spelling it chokin' instead of chicken."

[1] PUBLISHER'S READER: Shouldn't say that if I were you, they won't know what Poussin means.
Don't worry. Let 'em look it up in the French Dic. Do 'em good.—AUTHOR.

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And then and there, before you could say "knife", one of the elves, at a sign from the Queen, put down by the fireplace one of the Baron's second-best plates and on it a wing of fowl, complete with liver and a bit of bacon and a fat sausage all done to a turn, with heaps of milky bread-sauce; and another produced a scuttle full of coal, and shot it into the grate, afterwards blowing it, with her little cheeks puffed out, into a lovely blaze.

"Thanks! That'll do me fine," said Pusskin. "I'm much obliged. This is my lucky evening and no mistake!"

Then the Fairy Queen turned to Scraps, and poked the wand at him saying what sounded like "Abracadabra" twice, and what do you think happened then?

Why; Scraps found himself all of a sudden in a royal-blue coat and waistcoat, all covered with embroidered half-moons and Signs of the Zodiac, and trousers to match, with a hole cut for his tail to stick out of; and a three-cornered hat; also elegant pumps on his back toes and white kid gloves on his fore-paws. And to crown all, a shiny cloak-thing, lined with real rabbit, to go over everything in case it rained or snowed I suppose. And you had to look at him twice before you could tell he was a dog at all.

"What ho!" cried he, capering about on his back legs; "look at me! This is exactly what the doctor ordered. Gosh! Pusskin; ain't I a swell! You and your chicken! You think too much of your tummy, you do. Don't you wish you were dressed up too? Don't you wish you were me?"

"No fear," said Pusskin. "I'm not keen on looking like something out of a circus, thank you. No, you go and enjoy yourself; don't be late back and mind you put the chain up when you come in, and don't make a row on the

stairs, or be sick, like you did last time when you went on a bust."

"What do you want to rake up that for?" asked Scraps in an injured tone. "I never tell tales about you!"

"No; because I'm a lady, I am; and too well brought up to be led into vulgar excess, while *you* never know when you've had enough. And if I take the air of an evening, I'm always on the mat to the tick. Correct in my behaviour all the time; that's me. And now leave me," she ended, pensively surveying the plate, "I would be alone."

All this had happened much quicker than it takes to tell; nevertheless the Fairy Queen raised her wonder-working wand once more, and touched the clock-face; and the hands whirred round backwards, so that they pointed to quarter past seven, which was about the time the others had set out. So you see, this would mean that Cinders would get to the Palace almost as soon as they did.

I tell you, it's marvellous what fairies can do.

"Now, Cinderella," said her Godmother, "don't keep the carriage waiting, or the ponies will get cold in their backs, and the driver one in his nose and it would be undignified if he had a sneezing fit just as you were getting out at the Palace! So quickly, dear, have a real good time but," she added impressively, "REMEMBER, TWELVE O'CLOCK!"

Then, as she gave Cinders another kiss, the lackey came forward offering his arm, but Scraps bustled him out of the way (with such vim, he—the footman—fell up against the copper) and offered his left front paw, and proud as a peacock with his mistress on his arm, they both passed out and got into the coach—which wasn't a bit chilly. The footman, having dashed the dust and soap-suds off his coat with his gloves, banged the door to, and sprang up behind, the coachman whipping up the ponies and away-to-go; the Queen and the elves blowing kisses and calling out

"Good-bye, Cinderella!" and "Twelve p.m.! Don't forget!"

Then they turned out the light and disappeared through the clock door, and all was flickering firelight and silence, except for a crunchy and squashy sound coming from where Pusskin was putting it across the bones and bread-sauce.

CHAPTER V

The Unrecognised Guest

I SEE I haven't told you how the Baron and Co. got to the Palace. Well; he managed to wangle the post-chaise and get it titivated up by Gubbins, the latter rather hoping, I think, that with so many people going to the Ball, someone, if the old box-on-wheels was smartened up a bit, might be sufficiently attracted to make an offer for it as a museum piece.

As he said to himself, "You never know."

And so he whitewashed the outside, and happening to have some pale green distemper by him, used that for the interior.

Some whitewash left over he applied to Bucephalus; who patiently submitted to this all-over external decoration, having had similar experiences on previous occasions when there had been a wedding on; the effect of the whole equipage being, if somewhat spectral in appearance, not unpleasing to the eye when one got used to it.

The Baron, by crafty generalship, and by sliding down the banisters, had managed to dash out to the chaise and get inside it first, and once in, refused to budge. The Blimp, having first distracted the Skyscraper's attention by saying "Oh look!" and pointing behind her at the moat, oiled in quick alongside of him, to the chagrin of her sister who was literally beaten by a short head, and commenced an impassioned harangue on the Rights of Minorities. After hearing the opening sentences, the Baron, squashed in the corner, jerked the reins threaded through the broken window in front,

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and with a chirruping noise, interrupted Bucephalus' meditations on the Why of the Thingumbob, and induced him to proceed at a dignified if lumbering trot; the Skyscraper, with her toupée all sideways, running alongside, vociferating rude remarks until, hampered by a tightish skirt and out of breath, she collapsed mourning in the roadway.

However, she had a bit of luck, for an empty furniture van going the right way happened to pass, and as the end doors were open, she made a flying leap at it as it rumbled by, and, unobserved by the driver, hoisted herself over the tailboard at no more cost than a bumped elbow and a laddered stocking. As a matter of fact she passed the chaise, putting her tongue out as she did so—she would!—and was just in front of the other two, all the way.

Near the Palace the pantechnicon turned down a side street, so she was obliged to drop off as best she could, and as she did so, Bucephalus, who was plodding along close behind her, and who had never forgiven her for once giving him a horseradish painted to look like a carrot, barged, accidentally on purpose, broadside-on into her, and a wheel of the chaise ran over her big toe, causing dire despondency, and direr language, as she hopped about on one foot tenderly nursing the other with both hands.

Serves her right, don't you think?

Their combined arrival caused a good deal of excitement, especially among the small boys gathered at the portico, who greeted them with unseemly hilarity; and freely and audibly expressed their opinion that it was a bit of the Lord Mayor's Show "wot 'ad lorst isself"; and not only that, but one of them invited the agonised Skyscraper, leaping about on one leg, to "Do it agyne, lydy! My young bruvver missed the first bit."

But the interest these three aroused was nothing to that caused by Cinders' imposing arrival as her magnificent equipage drew up at the Grand Palace. The guard thought

she must surely be royalty or at least a Duchess. The trumpeters ditto, and, to be on the safe side, sounded a fanfare. And the Lord Chamberlain, and Mayor, and the Chairman of the local council, who had hurriedly been sent for, galloped out to greet her with suitable respect.

Now you'd think that Cinders, fresh from the sordid surroundings in which she had spent a good part of her life, would have been overcome by shyness and whatnot, wouldn't you? But don't forget the Fairy Queen had said she would see that her Godchild had the necessary embonpoint—or do I mean aplomb?—to enable her to cope with any situation which might arise. Consequently when she alighted she was perfectly self-possessed, and received courtesies with curtsies—(joke, ha! ha!)—and a gracious smile for everybody.

But if you are smart young 'uns you will shake your heads doubtfully and ask, "But how could she get into the ballroom without someone announcing her and saying who she was?"

Well, this is what happened.

One of the Palace attendants hissed to Cinders' coachman in a hurried whisper "Ooisit?" and coachy, thinking Scraps was referred to, replied in an undertone out of the corner of his mouth, "Carntcherseetsterrier?"

Now the attendant did not catch it clearly, but did his best and passed on, as he thought, the correct information to a herald in a cream and gold tabard at the entrance to the ballroom, who immediately bawled out:

"The Marchioness Hysteria!"

So in she went, accepting the title as she did all the other extraordinary happenings of this wonderful night, everyone looking at her in admiration; Scraps, being a dog of intelligence and resource, padding behind her on his hind legs, holding her train with his fore-paws as if he were a page.

The King, as he sat on his throne alongside the Queen, noticing something dazzling coming through the entrance door, hurriedly rubbed his eyes and polished up his specs, and looked to see what it was.

"Crown and sceptre! What a peach!"—referring to Cinders, not Scraps of course—he muttered to himself, and to the Queen, "'Scuse me, my dear," and beetled off to see this radiant vision close to. A great honour indeed! Do you think Godmother had something to do with it?

"How do you do, my dear?" he murmured, thinking he had never seen anything so brilliantly lovely in his life; and as he did not know, and could not guess, who she was, but deciding to play it safe, added, "And how is your progenitor?"

Here again you know, back at the Keep, Cinders might have thought "progenitor" was some new kind of nerve complaint, and answered all wrong; or, if she had known the word meant "father" would have chirruped, "Top-hole," or, "In the pink, thanks, how's things with you?" but knowledge and a new dignity seemed to have descended on her and she replied with a low obeisance and in a clear voice, not stammering at all:

"I'm profoundly grateful to your Supreme Majesty for your condescension and your gracious enquiry. My father is in the enjoyment of perfect health, and tenders, through me, his respectful homage."

And this tactful speech, prompted, I fancy, by Godmother, combined with her flushed face and sparkling eyes, completed the King's first favourable impression, which he never afterwards lost, so that he fell for her right away, and with a gratified smirk himself led her to the Queen, introducing her—making a bloomer in his turn—as:

"The daughter of my old and esteemed friend the Marquis Mysteria."

Hopped about on one foot tenderly nursing the other.
Ramshackle Keep

(See p. 182)

And again Cinders said and did the right thing, observing with a sweeping curtsey :

"I'm greatly honoured by this presentation to your Majesty ; this is a proud moment to which I have long looked forward."

(And I bet not one of you could have carried it off like that.)

Her Majesty, trying to remember who the Marquis Mysteria could be, and where he hailed from, was so pleased with this remark and so impressed by the new arrival's appearance, that she took both Cinders' hands in hers and kissed her forehead, saying :

"I am happy to meet you, my dear child," and tactful in her turn, although completely mystified as to Cinders' identity, added conventionally, if a trifle vaguely, "I'm so glad you were able to come."

Then she made her sit in the place of honour, introduced her to all the nobs, and talked to her about all sorts of things, from the newest fashions in hats down to the latest tune on the barrel-organs, and every moment was more and more captivated by Cinders' modest demeanour, good sense, and pretty ways. And she mused, "Who *can* she be ? This is just the sort of girl I'd like for Hildy."

As for the King, he could not take his eyes off this richly-attired guest, whose dress made every other girl's look like a reach-me-down from the Bargain Basement.

Her Majesty's eyes had meanwhile been roving round among those present, hoping to spot her son. At last she nudged her consort, saying much to his surprise, "Do go and show the Marchioness the picture gallery and the gold-fish," an injunction with which he started up to comply with such alacrity he nearly tripped over his feet. The Queen, waiting till he and Cinders were well on the way and out of hearing (Scraps still acting as Guard of the Train—joke, ho ! ho ! copyright), whispered hurriedly behind the back of her

hand to the First Lady-in-Waiting, "Find Prince Hildebrand and fetch him here. Hurry up!" thinking in her own mind, "If this doesn't ring the bell and return the penny nothing will."

Well, that shows you, doesn't it?

CHAPTER VI

Cupid Gets Busy

BUT what a hilt they had for Hundlebrand—I meant what a hunt they had for Hildebrand but I get so excited over this bit—and where do you think they found him? Why, down in his snuggery in the basement, playing shove-ha'penny with two of his particular cronies, instead of doing duty upstairs by partnering fair ladies.

However, when he heard his royal mother desired his presence he at once took the lift to the ballroom floor. Just as he arrived there his father was returning with Cinders to the Queen, and, as it happened, the Prince and Cinders met face to face, and saw each other simultaneously.

And she looked at him, a long look; and blushed and dropped her eyelashes over her eyes.

He decided at once he had never seen anything so beautiful, but he did not blush, not he! nor did he drop his eyelashes; on the contrary he kept his eyes very wide open and fixed on her, and for the first time in his existence looked positively goo-goo.

And a sort of something—they were never afterwards able to explain exactly what it was—seemed to dart from his heart to hers, and another something from hers to his, nodding on passing half-way.

Meanwhile the King was saying to her:

"This is my dear son," and to him, "the Lady Mysteria."

Upon which she was about to drop a curtsey to the Prince but he stopped her, and instead, did what he had never been known to do before, fell on one knee before her

and kissed her hand—carefully choosing the left one and having a good look to see if there was a wedding or engagement ring on it, which, much to his relief, there wasn't of course! Then he rose, and they both looked deep into each other's eyes. And each gave a little embarrassed giggle and then he offered her his arm on one side, and the King his on the other, and all three went up a wide lane between the bowing guests back to the throne.

No one present had ever seen anything like it, and all the guests whispered to each other, "Who ever is she?"

The King, who had duly observed the exchange of looks and the hand-kissing, suddenly unhitched Cinders' hand off his arm, and hurried on ahead to the Queen's side, hoarsely breathing in her ear:

"They've clicked!"

"What? Who have?" said the Queen, rubbing her cheek where the royal beard had tickled it.

"Hildy and Mysteria!"

"No! Really?" said the Queen very pleased, but quite unprepared for such a rapid development, and feeling it was too good to be true.

"You watch 'em!" chuckled the King.

Well, there was not much doubt about it, for the Prince then and there begged Cinders to dance with him, then again, and then again, and again. Waltz, gavotte, minuet. . . . What? Two-steps? Of course not! Don't be silly. People danced dignified dances in those times—and if she was claimed by anyone else he fidgeted about impatient for her to return to him. And when later on he said "Shall we sit out this one?" and she murmured, "I'd love to," his heart gave a great leap against his back teeth. So they sought out a secluded corner which held just two if sitting close together.

And $\frac{\text{he}}{\text{she}}$ said to $\frac{\text{her}}{\text{him}}$ "Er . . . er . . ." And then stopped; and then, both together, "I beg your pardon?"

and he said, stammering like a schoolboy, "You first!" and she said, "No, you!"

And he said "Er . . ." again, and then words came out with a rush, "I have never met anyone like you before!"

And she answered with her little heart beating so loudly she thought at first it must be a big drum in the orchestra, "Nor I, you."

And then his hand stole to hers and held it ever so tight; and when he felt the pressure gently returned, he was almost delirious with happiness.

And after that, they never said a word for a while. Just sat.

And he said to himself, "I wonder, oh! I wonder if I dare kiss her!" and then he decided "No! better not, whatever would she think of me!—mustn't rush things."

On the other hand—and I must say I feel rather surprised, not to say shocked—she was saying to herself, "I rather wish he'd kiss me, I think."

"And what do you do with yourself all day?" he asked.

"Oh!" she answered, "I manage the household affairs, and make myself generally useful."

"Do you indeed!" he said admiringly.

"And I look after the meals," she added.

"*Do* you? Do you mean you settle what's for dinner?"

"Yes," she replied, "and I cook it too!"

"WHAT! You don't mean to say you can cook?"

"Oh! Can't I," she said with a laugh. "I could bake you an apple-turnover which would make you leave home and mother for—make one now if you like," she added mischievously, but would have been quite ready to go down to the kitchen to do it.

The Prince, who was partial to apple-turnovers, laughed too, thinking to himself, "This is the jolliest girl I've ever met and the one I've been looking for, although I didn't know it till now." And as he visualised to himself the

delightful possibility of being alone with her in the evenings, he in his woolly slippers after a day's hunting and she sitting by him, or better still, on his knee, his eyes, wandering round, fell on a bowl close by, full of beautiful roses. He leaned forward and picked out a Maréchal Niel bud, and, turning to her he kissed it and held it out to her.

And she—wasn't she a bold little hussy!—looked straight at him and kissed it too, and put it in her corsage.

Well, I mean to say, the only place fit for anyone blind to a broad hint like that would have been a mental home. The Prince, being no fool, naturally reached out both arms and gathered her in and their lips met in the longest, and thrillingest kiss since the beginning of time. At least so they both thought as they came unstuck.

. . . . .

We will now leave them—they don't want us. Let's go back to the ballroom, shall we?

CHAPTER VII

Time's Up!

THERE the Prince's obvious attachment for the attractive but unknown guest remained the subject of general whispered conversation and speculation. Some of those present tried to pump the herald for information about her; but he was not helpful because he'd had so much iced . . . er . . . water to cool him down after standing close to the radiator at the ballroom door when calling out names of arrivals; and so much . . . er . . . hot cocoa to warm him up after getting chilled to the marrow in the portico, he was rather hazy and confused, and mixed up Cinders' coach with the Bustup turn-out, and all he could remember (quite wrongly) was that she "Come with a elderly gent." So enquirers drew blank.

But doesn't it show you what a difference clothes make! Baron Bustup had looked straight at Cinders more than once and didn't recognize his own child, who giggled inside every time he passed her. Nor did either of the Wotisits twig she was their own sister. The Blimp, on the contrary, taking her for a stranger, called her, in her usual unpleasant manner, a "pert, forward chit"; her sister referring to Cinders as a "horrid little minx". And both together (for once in their lives in agreement) hissed "Disgusting! why isn't something done about it?"

Still, why *should* they have guessed it was Cinders, seeing they had left her in her old rags in the kitchen of Ramshackle Keep only an hour or so before?

Then the Blimp, who didn't dance because she was too fat to stay the course, and whose idea of bliss was to see how much food she could tuck away without bursting, made a bee-line for the supper-room, and loaded up with lobster mayonnaise, mince pies, Stilton cheese, roast duck, pickled cabbage, marrons glacées, soused herring, and jam roly-poly, until she became almost torpid and groped her way to an alcove in an unlit corner of the conservatory where she deposited herself on a Chesterfield and went to sleep with her feet up; to the annoyance and embarrassment of sundry couples who had also made for that particular retreat—one pair as near as a toucher sat down on her, mistaking her in the dim light for cushions extra generous in size.

And the Skyscraper found some of the guests playing "Snap" or "Happy Families"—the then current form of "Bridge"—in an ante-room, and cut in with them; ending up, owing to her peculiar reading of the rules no less than to her somewhat menacing and sinister manner when contradicted, by winning three and ninepence ha'penny.

Meanwhile the King and the Baron had interchanged courtesies and found they were kindred souls, the latter amusing his Majesty by telling him a funny story about an Irishman and a Scotsman; and in return the King asked him riddles like "Why does a hen run across the road?" They both laughed a great deal and got along famously; the King at last slapping the Baron on the back remarking jovially, "I feel as if I'd known you for years, and wish I had." And the Baron replied, "Same here."

They became inseparable after that, but the King who usually went to bed not later than ten o'clock, began about eleven p.m. to get very drowsy, and it was as much as he could do to keep awake.

He and the Baron sat together on a couch watching the dancing, when his Majesty, whose head had kept nodding and springing up with a jerk, interrogated sleepily,

"You married?"

"No, Sire, no wife; widower; three daughters."

"Whisisem?" asked the King yawning.

"Well, two of 'em are here somewhere, but I can't see 'em."

"Goolooking?"

"Well, I've seen worse," said the Baron, adding to himself, "but not much."

"Lessgoanfinem," said the King with another yawn, "for if I donkeemovin' I shall do shut-eye right away."

So they went off on a search expedition, and eventually found the Blimp parked in the conservatory fast asleep, snoring with her mouth open, and her bulgy cheeks quivering like jellies. Oh, a pretty sight!

"That's one of 'em," said the Baron.

His Majesty looked; put on his glasses, took them off, breathed on them, polished them up with the edge of his royal robe, took another look through them, caught his breath, and averted his gaze quickly.

"*Is* it," said he. "We should sympathise with one another; and I'll tell you why; she recalls sad thoughts, reminding me of a prized porker I was much attached to, intending her to become bacon later on, but she died of heart complaint after seeing a string of sausages. It grieved me very much." Then with another yawn, "Lessee other one."

So they resumed their voyage of discovery and found the Skyscraper in the card-room wrangling over her winnings and losings. After seeing her, first without, and then with, his horn-rimmed specs, and moving to left and then to right to see if she looked better from there, the King said musingly, "Well, we all have our troubles, haven't we?"

"True," said the Baron, "but we also have our compensations. I wish you could have seen my third; by name 'Cinderella'; there's no comparison between her and her sisters. She's as pretty as paint."

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"Is she indeed?" asked the King rather incredulously. "You surprise me; why didn't you bring her too?"

"Well," stammered the Baron, "she has not long put her hair up and er . . . her sisters thought better not; but take it from me she is the best looker for miles, and a good girl to her old Father."

"I like the sound of her. Tell you what," said the King, "my wife presides alternate Tuesday afternoons at the weekly sewing-class and is there hours and hours. How would it be if I came round to your place and saw her for myself?"

This was indeed flattering to the Baron, but his heart sank when he thought of Cinders' scanty wardrobe, so he coughed, and hedging to gain time replied, "I'm more than honoured, Sire; give me time to prepare her for your gracious visit, dropping me a post-card before you come." And it was left at that.

And so the night wore on.

. . . . .

But alas! Cinders was so enraptured with the Prince and everything, that she forgot all about the time and never looked at the watch her Godmother had lent her.

Until . . . (I hate this part).

Until . . . (it makes me feel sort of squirmy inside).

Until . . . just as both were floating round in a dreamy waltz, the clock began to strike.

"Is that nine or ten o'clock?" asked she, quite casually and innocently.

"Neither, my darling. It is twelve," replied Hildebrand.

What a shock for her! She remembered!

"Oh! help!!! What *will* Godmother say?" she yipped, wrenching herself away and making a wild dash for the door.

But; too late! As she neared it the last stroke of midnight boomed out; there was a sound like fire-irons falling downstairs, all the lights went out and then flared up again,

and her gorgeous dress was whisked away; ptz! and vanished; and the astonished guests saw a little girl in drab brown rags and soiled kitchen apron, and looking scared into fits, dodging past them to the exit.

Close to it she all but collided with the King, who, amazed at such an unlooked-for apparition, turned round and looked after her, ejaculating, "Whoever's that?"

Scraps, who had a moment or two before come up from the Kitchen Department, suddenly saw the well-known figure of his mistress flying through the room, and raced after her amid shouts of "Turn that dog out!" and, "Where did that brute come from?" and such like, for of course his beautiful costume had gone too, and one of the servants flung a doughnut at him, hitting him smack in the ribs. Scraps' one thought being to catch up with Cinders, took no notice beyond an annoyed "Gurr—r—r—r," and when he saw her disappearing, as he thought, behind a curtain, he made a dash for it too. But it was not a curtain; no! it was the King's robe with the King inside it. Speaking of it later, His Majesty said his impression was that there had been an earthquake or else the kitchen boiler had burst, for his feet flew up in the air and he came down with a shocking bump on his—I mean sat down abruptly—and for a panic-struck second had a misty idea his shirt had blown off him!

But it hadn't; it was Scraps dashing out from under his robe.

. . . . .

Out through the portico flew Cinders.

Out after her raced Scraps.

After them streamed a confused mob of the guests all excitingly shouting at them and each other. Behind them slowly came the Prince, peering vaguely right and left, for he could not for the life of him understand why the Dearest Girl Ever should be with him one split-second, and in the next had utterly vanished. So he was questing after her, and

feeling quite bewildered and nonplussed; like you would if somebody jerked the chair away just as you were about to sit down.

When he saw the King go down with a thud, he stooped to help him to his feet, asking him if he had hurt himself, and as he did so, he saw on the floor in a corner, something very bright flashing at him.

Promptly letting go of his father who very nearly fell down again, he picked it up and looked at it.

He recognised it at once, and pressed it to his lips.

It was one of Cinders' glass slippers.

His impression was that there had been an earthquake.

Ramshackle Keep

(*See p.* 195)

CHAPTER VIII

The Morning After

NOW most of you who have been to parties know what the morning after is like. Flat, stale, and unprofitable. Everything as dull as ditchwater and the day seems a week long. To put it shortly, an anti-climax. Let's see how all our friends were—for I hope by this time they, or some of them, *are* your friends—and what they were doing the day following the foregoing events.

Cinders first. When she tore out of the Palace, faithful Scraps close at her heels, she headed straight for home, but after she had got a little way she lost both her old shoes, and the stones hurt her feet, and she was soon so tired that she could run no further and sank down exhausted and unconscious; her four-footed friend licking her hands and her face, frightfully worried about her. But in obedience to orders, the elves, who though invisible had been watching over her all the time, came along and, lifting her gently, flew through the night with her straight to Ramshackle Keep, right into her room, undressed her and laid her on her little lumpy mattress (for of course the Wotisits took care to have the best beds in the castle), and tucked her in with loving hands. Others collected the old slippers, while the rest heaved up Scraps, at first vigorously and volubly objecting and kicking like mad, and bore him along too, popping him down at the foot of the bed and there they left them, both fast asleep.

When the day broke and she woke up, she thought for a moment she had had a beautiful dream and got up to dress,

but when she picked up her clothes, neatly folded on a chair, what do you think she found?

A creamy rosebud!

Then she knew it was no dream, and dissolved (why, she didn't quite know) in a flood of tears as she gently handled it. But she was as a rule, in spite of what she had to contend with, a brave and cheerful little person; so after a good cry she blew her nose and said to herself, "Come now, Cinders, this won't do. Pull yourself together. You had a topping time and nothing lasts for ever. Besides, always remember that dear Hildebrand kissed you. Will you ever see him again? Oh dear! Oh dear! Now, now," she said reprovingly as another tear or two gathered in her eyes, "stop that! Anyhow, here's his loving and lovely gift to me. Oh rosebud; dear, dear, rosebud; don't ever fade or die!"

Then with a kiss on its fragrant petals she stuck it in some water in her tooth-glass, and hoped for the best, and it perked up wonderfully and scented the whole room.

Scraps woke up too and after stretching himself, followed her downstairs like a shadow, looking volumes of undying devotion. In the kitchen they found by the fireplace an empty plate and a somewhat bloated Pusskin curled up in a state of coma, so much so, that Cinders had to lift her, sleepily protesting, out of the way in order to lay and light the fire. I don't think much of Pusskin, do you? I think Scraps was right when he said her tummy was her chief concern in life.

The Baron and his daughters had come back in the post-chaise, the latter inside it and he out, for this time the Wotisits had got in first; so he climbed up on the roof, and having said "Home, Bucey!" that dependable animal, pondering on the Whichness of the Wherefore, had drawn them placidly back—the reins trailing along the road—to Gubbins' forge, whence they had to walk home—luckily not far.

The Morning After

The Baron thought it wasn't worth while to go to bed, so changed his things and taking his rod went for an early morning's fishing for pike in the moat, caught a whopper, and was very bucked.

The Blimp, still gorged like a boa-constrictor after lunch, got into bed just as she was, shoes and all, and slept until late in the afternoon.

The Skyscraper, who on retiring had hung up her clothes on the floor, all anyhow, was sitting up against her pillows in a yellow and purple bed-jacket, nibbling Nougat and gloating over three silver forks, a fish-slice and a rustless steel cake-knife, all pinched from the Palace supper-room, and for which Mr. Swadger and Mr. Hadgley were even then hunting high and low.

Bucephalus was being hosed down by Gubbins and musing on the Whetness of the Whatter, and thinking, as he looked at the dirty whitewashy pool round his hooves, how grey life and everything was.

The King, limping a little, concentrated on dodging his wife, who was extremely anxious to get him by himself to cross-examine him with a view to obtaining more detailed particulars about the Marquis of Mysteria. She herself was very peeved at Cinders' sudden disappearance. As she said to the First Lady-in-Waiting, "I don't know when I have taken to anyone so much; and yet she goes and leaves me flat, without even saying 'good-bye'. It gives me a pain in the neck to think about it."

And that's all about the King and Queen for the present.

Remains the Prince, who had called in the head of the C.I.D., and bade him spare neither time nor money to find Cinders. So detectives were busy north, south, east and west enquiring for a Marchioness Mysteria who had never existed; following up false clues, leading nowhere or to quite the wrong people, and getting no forrader.

Meanwhile Hildebrand went and sat where he and the Only Girl in the World had sat the night before, and fondled

the little glass slipper and looked like a camel with colic, or one of those depressions over Iceland we are always hearing about.

He had refused breakfast, and didn't line up for lunch; and as no one seemed to know where he was, the Queen went to look for him. So preoccupied was she that in going out of the banqueting hall, although she had been hunting for her husband all morning, she passed the latter as he was coming in, but—owing to his flattening himself against the wall and trying to look like part of the pattern of the wall-paper—she never saw him!

When she found the Prince her mother's heart grieved at his woebegone look.

"Aren't you coming in to lunch, my dear?" she enquired.

"Lunch! Oh Mother! how can you talk to me about lunch when I am feeling so utterly miserable? I don't want lunch. You know what I want. I want HER back; oh, so badly!"

"Well, my dear boy, I dare say she'll turn up. Starving yourself will do no good. Anyway, there are other girls."

(This was really said to rally him; in her own mind she had quite decided that Cinders was first and the rest nowhere so far as her offspring was concerned.)

"Not for me, Mother; you know I don't care about any of them, only her; and she has gone; and taken my heart with her. Look! this is all I have belonging to her," and he produced the slipper from inside his vest where it made a pronounced bulge.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed the Queen, "Surely she never went away with only one slipper on?"

"She must have done, because here is the other!"

"Well then, it's easy! That's an expensive bit of foot-joy. What's the maker's name?"

"There isn't one," he answered. "There's only 'Made in England' on the lining."

"Well, she's sure to be making enquiries for it, take my word for it. Especially if she hired her costume! We shall hear from her soon, I'm certain."

The Prince cheered up at that and saying, "Do you really think so? I do hope you're right," allowed himself to be shepherded downstairs, and had some soup and a cut off the joint with two veg., after which he felt a little, though not much, better.

But day by day passed, and no word came to comfort him. The whole country was combed through and through without result, and advertisements in the "Agony Columns" of the newspapers remained unanswered. Not surprising, as the Baron couldn't afford to take in any, and the Wotisits only subscribed to a weekly one dealing exclusively with fashions—*you* know, one of those with a brown paper pattern in every issue.

When the Queen ultimately ran the King to earth, and questioned him on the subject of his "old and esteemed friend the Marquis of Mysteria," he wriggled out of it by saying he had not heard of him for years until the other night and really did not know his present address.

"Then how did you know she was the Marquisisisis daughter?" queried the Queen, who was weak on the possessive case when there was an "s" at the end of a word to be reckoned with.

"Well, they said she was, and she didn't contradict 'em."

"But who did she come with?" she asked.

"How do I know! I didn't go round asking!"

"But if she is a Marchioness, where was the Marchion or whatever he is? Would he be a brother or something?"

"Chase me!" replied he. "Conundrums ain't in my line."

"H'm; it's all very puzzling. I should hate to think she was gate-crashing," said her Majesty. "No, I'm certain as little apples grow on trees that there's nothing fishy about

that girl; but being young, I suppose she is a bit careless and inconsiderate in not calling or writing!" A statement in part supported and in part hotly contested by Hildebrand, who said he would bet his bottom dollar she was straight as a gun-barrel, and far too sweet and nice-natured to come uninvited, or not to be thoughtful for other people; and that she must have caught a chill or something, poor darling, and was probably in bed with a hot-water bottle!

CHAPTER IX

Hunt the Slipper

THEN the Queen had an inspiration, though she admitted there might be flaws in the suggestion, and observed:

"I don't suppose there are two two-legged girls in this country who have such small feet. This slipper looks to me like a small two too—are you willing to take a chance?"

"Chance of what?" asked the Prince wanly, but hopefully.

"I mean this. Let us issue a Proclamation that anyone whom this slipper fits exactly will hear of Something to her Advantage; then let there be a house-to-house visitation, and let every woman try it on. If it does fit someone, and it's the wrong girl, you can put her off with a ticket in the next sweep, or some cigarette cards."

"But I hate to think of it being on any foot but hers."

"Rubbish!" said the Queen. "An ounce of sense is worth a ton of sentiment, and don't forget dear boy, WE want to find her too; and I can think of no other way."

Well, after arguing it out, Hildebrand gave way, and, after passionately kissing it all over and with a sigh so heavy it rustled the window-curtains, handed the glass slipper to the Chief Herald; telling him that if it got damaged or lost he (the Prince) would twist his (the Herald's) head off at the roots. And meant it, too.

So the Herald, and his Vice and Assistant-Heralds, and one or two Sub-Assistant Vice-Heralds, and half a dozen

trumpeters, and what not, made the Proclamation from the steps of the Town Hall.

But Cinders and her family did not happen to hear of it, wet weather having set in and they not going out much.

And what a time the Herald and Co. had! And what an intimate knowledge of she-tootsies they acquired in the course of their peregrinations! They inspected ever so many medium and outsize insteps and ankles, with and without stockings on, some feet complete with corns and chilblains and some not, until at last their whole horizon seemed to be festooned with feminine extremities; feet seeming to dangle before them in the air wherever they went.

There were other complexities too. Every time a foot, with a girl attached, seemed likely to go into it, the crystal slipper behaved most obstreperously. If they started to try it on the left foot, it turned into one for the right; if on the right, into a left one. If it didn't play either of those tricks, it would wriggle like an eel or shrink to the size of a baby's shoe or else expand everywhere until it looked like a young canal-boat which had not quite grown up. No wonder the Herald's hair got thin on the top, and his forehead became lined with anxiety over the uncanny behaviour of what he called—the Prince not being there to hear him—"the darn thing."

And, another curious circumstance, although only Scraps and Cinders knew about it, the rosebud continued to look as fresh, and to smell as sweet, as the day it was plucked.

What? Don't contradict! I tell you, it did!

And matters went on like this for over a month, the Prince looking daily sadder and sadder, losing weight, and going right off his golf, until one Tuesday afternoon when the King, after making sure his wife had mizzled off to the Sewing Meeting, suddenly decided this was an opportunity for him to look up his new friend, the Baron, and make the acquaintance of Cinderella.

Too late to send a post-card as arranged, of course.

So putting on his out-door crown and a pair of stout boots, he took his best umbrella and set off to call at Ramshackle Keep.

Just as he approached the drawbridge he met Scraps—who recognised him and came curvetting up, his rudder a blur of tailwags. His Majesty was fond of all dogs, and stooped to pat him, and a vague notion came into his mind that he had seen this particular animal before, but he couldn't recall when or where.

So he continued up to the front door and pulled the bell, and Cinders, in her ragged dress, came to open it.

The King took off his hat and bowed, being, as all Kings are, extremely polite, and got as far as "Is Baron Bustup . . . ?" when Cinders, whose heart was in her mouth when she saw him, went red as fire, and made a startled sound rather resembling a soda-water syphon when it's finishing up.

He couldn't help noticing her confusion even without his specs, but he shoved them on his nose and looked more closely at her, and then at Scraps, and then at her again; then down at her feet, and staggering back, made a noise like a horse neighing, and gibbered—indeed almost screamed at her:

"Glorssshhh!!!"

And, would you believe it! turned round and positively chased himself back over the drawbridge and rapidly disappeared, leaving Cinders and Scraps with their mouths wide open with astonishment.

"Now, why ever did he do that? Did he recognise me? No; I don't see how he could. Perhaps he didn't like me in this old dress," she murmured as she shut the door, and with a tiny wrinkle across her brow returned to her drab and thankless tasks.

Meanwhile the King was running like mad, his crown joggling over his eyebrows; tripping over roots of trees,

barking his shins, bumping into lamp-posts, and losing his brolly, and one of his gloves, until he arrived bruised and breathless at the Palace and burst in on the Queen, returned sooner than usual, and the Prince, panting out,

"Where's that blessed Herald? Where is he?"

"There's a smut on your nose," said his wife.

"Oh blow the smut on my nose!"

"Blow it yourself," said the Queen.

"Tchah!" yelped his Majesty, "where's that Herald, dash it!"

"What do you want him for?" asked she.

"Never mind what I want him for; I want him, where is he?"

"How do I know?" said the Queen. "I don't keep him in my vanity bag. Run away and ask someone else."

So the King turned on his heel and shot off to look for the Chief Inspector of Police; and when he found him he spluttered at him:

"Where's the Herald? Where's the Herald? Come on! Where is he?"

"I regret I must have notice of that question, your Majesty."

"Notice? NOTICE? You'll get notice all right if you don't stir yourself. Do you, or don't you, know where he is?"

"No, Sire."

"Look here, are you a detective or a defective? You go and find him and bring him here, pronto; or you'll lose your job. Sharp's the word! Pack of lazy hangers-on," he muttered, as the Chief of the C.I.D., looking like ninepence in the shilling discount, sped away to obey the Royal Command.

Well, the Herald and suite were right at the other end of the country, wearily trailing round with the slipper, inspecting dozens of feet of all shapes and sizes, some of them square and some triangular; but he was run to earth at last and fetched back poste-haste and ushered into the King's presence.

"Where's that blooming glass slipper?"

"Here, your Majesty," he said, breathing on it and giving it a rub on his sleeve.

"Right! Now listen; do you know Ramshackle Keep?" stuttered he, the words all running together in his excitement.

"Do I know ram-cattle squeak? I don't understand, your Majesty."

"Oh! dash it! D-o, do; y-o-u, you; k-n-o-w, know; a c-a-s-t-l-e, castle; called Ramshackle Keep?"

"Er—er—no: I don't think I do, Sire."

"And you call yourself a Herald! Gerrr!" snapped the King. "What do I pay you your salary for?"

"For heralding, your Majesty, and Proclamation stuff," answered he, knowing the answer to that one, but wondering what had occurred to upset the King's usual good temper.

"H'm. Well; yes!" answered the King, who was a reasonably-minded personage. "I suppose I do. Well; listen, and don't look like a stuffed owl. I'll tell you where it is," and he gave him minute but somewhat confused directions how to find the Baron's residence; adding:

"You go there and get hold of the gel who opens the door, and if that slipper doesn't fit her to a T, I'll boil my crown and eat it; but mind, not a word to the wife, nor Prince Hildebrand, in case I am wrong; but I'll lay all the boodle in the Bank to a brass button I'm not," he muttered as the Herald hurried away, wishful, in the King's present mood, to be elsewhere.

CHAPTER X

Fit and Unfit

THE King did not return to the Queen and Prince, for fear they might ask questions, and he didn't want to raise hopes which might possibly turn out to be false; in which case his wife would never let him hear the last of it. Avoiding them therefore, he dithered about out of sight, standing first on one, and then on the other leg, in a fever of impatience and wishing he had thought of getting hold of the slipper and taking it to Cinderella himself.

Unfortunately, when the Herald started it was nearly dark, and mistaking the way, was misdirected by the oldest inhabitant (and the deafest) of those parts sending him "round the corner, first turn to the left, the fourth to the right, then to the left again, and then straight on till you sees the duck-pond," only to find the name on the gate was "Ye Battlements." The result being that when eventually he arrived in sight of the Keep, he tried in the fading light to cross the moat at the wrong place by a draw-bridge which wasn't there, and fell in with no end of a splash. After which, remarking with some emphasis that he'd be blowed if he'd mess about with the somethinged slipper or proclaim anything—Archoo!—except that he was beastly wet, until he'd—Awush!!!—changed his togs, he brushed a newt or two and some tiddlers off his tabard, and dismissing his followers, ran home full pelt to get in between the blankets with a hot drink. So it was not till the next morning that he, and his attendants in all their finery, rang the Baron's bell.

Tried . . . to cross the moat . . . by a drawbridge which wasn't there.
Ramshackle Keep

(See p. 208

The Baron happening to be in the hall, it was he and not Cinders who opened the door this time.

"Good morrow, sir!" said the Herald; (the best Heralds all talk like that) "May we have a few minutes' conversation with you?"

"Walk right in," said the Baron. "Mind the step and that loose bit o' matting." So in the officer went with all his retinue, about ten of them, and immediately they got inside he enquired if the Baron was aware of the recent Proclamation.

"Proclamation? What Proclamation? First I've heard of it," said Bustup, staring at him, wondering what was up.

Then at a sign from the Herald, the trumpeters sounded a terrific flourish, which made the Baron, who had his back to them and was quite unprepared for it, nearly jump out of his skin. Then the Herald, having cleared his throat, thundered out:

"O yes! O yes! O yes!" and got the Proclamation off his chest.

And the Blimp heard the row and all about the foot-fitting.

So did the Skyscraper.

Cinders heard the noise but thought it might be the Waits, and being busy making beds, didn't bother to come down-stairs.

Well, it was explained to the Blimp that she was invited to "try on" so she said:

"Right ho! What do I get if it fits? A new lipstick or a bag of nuts? It looks about my size?" (which it didn't) and sat down and kicked off her shoes.

And the Sub-Vice-Assistant Herald went down on his knees and was about to see if the slipper would fit her, when it shrank up into the size of an undersized peapod and she said:

"Here! what are you playing at? Is this a Juggling Act?"

But although he tried again and again much the same

thing happened, till she told him that if she wasn't a perfect lady she'd slosh him in the eye.

Then the Skyscraper pushed her rudely on one side, with,

"Of course it wouldn't fit a fat lump like you; let *me* have a go."

And went through the same preliminaries as her sister, but the minute the shoe touched her big toe, she shrilled,

"Eeeeek! It's red hot!" and scurried off to shove her foot under the cold tap.

"Are these all the females in the place?" enquired the officer with a scorched thumb in his mouth, giving the slipper, which he had dropped on the floor, a very nasty look.

"Well er . . . er . . . no!" answered the Baron. "My youngest daughter is somewhere about, but I hardly think. . . ."

"Never mind what you think," said the Herald. "Orders is orders and I've got mine. Fetch her."

So the Baron went to the door and called out:

"Cinders!"

Then the Skyscraper returned doing dot-and-go-one from the sink, dripping water all over the floor.

"What do you want her for?" she asked, crossly. "She's got nothing to do with this."

And the Blimp chimed in:

"No use to try it on that little scrub, and she won't be fit to be seen."

"I never heard anything so silly," said the Skyscraper. "It's a waste of time, and putting ideas into her silly little nut."

(And you will remember it was not the first time she had said something like that.)

The Herald took no notice of them but struck a match on the shole of his soo—sorry! excitement again—sole of his shoe, and lighting a cigarette, waited impassively like a graven image.

"CINDERS!!!" again shouted the Baron, "Come along, I want you."

And her voice answered him,

"Coming in a minute; I'm just finishing doing out your room."

"Bother my room," yelled the Baron. "Come at once."

Then Cinders in her old house-shoes was heard flip-flopping down the stairs, and when she came round the bend, and saw all the magnificent people in the hall below, she was about to turn round and run up again, but her father said:

"Come along! these gentlemen want to see you. Don't be afraid. They won't bite!" and smiled at her.

So she continued on down, and the Herald, in case she had not heard it the first time, worked off the Proclamation again, but she was too flustered to take in properly what he was saying.

"Will you take a seat please, Miss?" said he, pushing forward a chair to the accompaniment of derisive sniffs from the Wotisits, "while I flip the sitter—I mean sip the flitter—oh, come on! Shove your toes into this."

So she sat down, giving a little gasp when she saw what he, rather gingerly, held in his hand, for the crystal slipper was still warmish, and, as he said, he never knew "what the blessed thing would do next." He knelt down before her, and at his request she took off her old slop-abouts and pointed her foot at him. A dear little foot; a foot of a duck—I mean, a duck of a foot—but the Herald was so sick of trotters he was not in the humour to admire it in the least, but just poked the footwear at her with no more hope of success than before.

Did it shrink? Or expand? Or scorch?

Not it! No difficulty whatever. It behaved like a lamb.

ON IT WENT! FITTING LIKE A GLOVE!

(Oh! you knew it would, did you? You know a lot, don't you?)

The Skyscraper gave a yell of rage, and for a moment looked as if she was—or were; which is right?—going for Cinders tooth and nail, but Scraps, with a "Gr-r-r-r!" gripped her skirt in his teeth and worried it so that she had to stop and look after herself for fear he might pull it right off.

The Blimp took it big, and with a squeal like an engine whistle, threw up her arms, and treading heavily on Pusskin's tail, went over in a fit of hysterics, either real or put-on, backwards into the hatstand, which collapsed on the top of her, burying her in the ruins of the cracked soup-tureen kept on it for visiting cards, and an avalanche of coats, hats, sticks and umbrellas.

And the trumpeters, who had been told exactly what to do if and when the Slipper fitted anyone, blew a special Jubilee blast in accordance with the regulations laid down.

So what with the din the Wotisits and Pusskin were making, and the trumpeting, you couldn't have heard yourself think.

CHAPTER XI

A Fitting Conclusion

NOW the King, who had somehow discovered that the visit to Ramshackle Keep was to be made that morning, and feeling he couldn't stand suspense any longer, had started for the Keep too.

And the Queen, who could see he had something up his sleeve, and was curious to know what it was, watched him slink off, and followed stealthily, keeping him in sight.

The Prince happened to notice her sleuth-like tactics, and trailed both of them.

When his Majesty, approaching the castle, heard triumphet trumpant blasts (there's something wrong there, but I can't spot what it is—can you?), he ejaculated:

"I knew it! I knew it! I knew it!" and broke into a run.

So did the Queen. And the Prince.

And they all flung into the Baron's hall in the order named, close on each other's heels at the very moment the Slipper was glittering on Cinders' foot.

The King saw it there, but winded by his run could only make gurgling noises, pointing at it.

But it was unnecessary to draw the Prince's attention to it, for he had seen Cinders first thing and was across that hall in two strides with a cry of:

"Own beloved! At last! my darling! Why did you leave me like that?" and knelt before her; this time not content with one salutation, but pressing both her hands to

his lips again and again, while she looked down at him with a tender smile, and her eyes alight.

For both of them no one else was there—only their two selves.

The Blimp, poking her fat face contorted with rage, out of the coats, umbrellas and china debris and regarding the lovers ejaculated spitefully:

"You sly little slut!"

Her elongated sister gave another yell and ran round and round in circles emitting squawk after squawk; making such a row that the King clapped his hands to his ears and shouted to the Head Trumpeter:

"For goodness' sake man! Toot! Go on! Toot! and keep on tooting until she runs down!"

And then a marvellous thing happened.

There was the same sound of silver bells as at the beginning of this story, and the clock-door opened as it did then and out came the Elves of the Hours followed by the Fairy Queen.

(Oh! you knew that was going to happen too, did you? Look here! Am I telling this tale or are you?)

The fairy stamped her foot and in a commanding tone cried:

"Peace!"

The trumpet died away in a plaintive moan like the gramophone when it slows up because you haven't cranked it up.

The Blimp made a noise like one of those blown-out rubber toys which deflate with a long mournful squeak diminuendo.

The Skyscraper stopped in the middle of a lap, and an eighty h.p. scream as if it had been turned off at the tap; and Pusskin ceased to bewail her flattened tail. And a restful silence descended upon them all.

The King, Queen and Prince were struck all of a heap at observing this puzzling addition to their number, but Cinders got up quickly and went up to the Fairy Queen—and kissed

her hand (having learnt that trick from Hildebrand, I expect), saying :

" Oh, Godmother ! I'm so sorry ! Forgive me ! I forgot all about twelve o'clock ! "

And the fairy looked at her lovingly, replying :

" I thought you would ; but never mind, no one is perfect. We all make mistakes, and it is good to have ups and downs and sweets and sours or life would be very dull ! Be of good cheer. Everything will turn out all right. You and everyone are going to have what is coming to them. Now, introduce me."

So Cinders curtsied to the King and Queen (who had both—especially the former—kissed her several times murmuring " Dear Child " together and separately, at intervals, neither seeming to notice her old working clothes a bit), saying :

" My Fairy Godmother, so please your Majesties." (Just as if she'd been accustomed to Court manners all her life!)

The Fairy Queen, having acknowledged their respectful salutations, said to Hildebrand, who on being addressed bowed low before her :

" Now, Prince, do you really and truly love my Godchild ? "

" Indeed I do, and shall all my life long," he replied earnestly.

" But look at her ! Look at her old dress ! Her ragged apron ! Her disreputable old shoes ! You can see she's as poor as a church mouse. She has nothing to commend her save her looks and loving and unselfish mind. Are you satisfied to take her as she is ? "

" Yes indeed ; for I adore her and always shall, with all my heart," he answered. " I don't care two hoots what she wears ; she's as lovely to me in these rags as she was in her beautiful dress at the Ball."

" I'm pleased with you," said the Fairy Queen, and looked it. " But I have observed you too for some years, and expected no less from you. You are worthy of her. Now watch !"

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And she took her wand from one of the elves and touched Cinders with the swansdown tip, just as she did once before, and lo! the tattered dress and torn apron vanished—this time for ever—and our heroine stood before them all in beautiful and rich raiment, looking every inch a Princess—except for one old shoe and one crystal slipper on.

Then the Fairy Queen commanded:

"The other slipper, please."

And an elf groped in the clock-case and brought it out, and that one was fitted on Cinders' other foot, and there she was all complete, radiant in looks and appearance. Oh, very nice! No wonder the Prince regarded her with love and pride.

The King had watched the proceedings with open mouth, wondering if anything similar could be done about the socks he had on, which had seen trouble. And he could have done with a brand-new pair.

CHAPTER XII

Punishment and Reward

ADDRESSING their Majesties, the Fairy Queen said: "There's no need for me to tell you to treasure my God-child, for I know you love her, and for all the affection you bestow upon her I promise that you will be amply repaid, in full measure running over."

Then, sternly addressing the Wotisits, by now regarding her with awe and trembling, and cringing in fear of they didn't know what:

"You two! Come and stand before me. It is seldom I use forcible language, but on this occasion I am amply justified. You are idle, greedy, good-for-nothings. No one, here, there, or anywhere, says a good word for you. You have been quarrelsome with each other, and with everyone; you have been disobedient and thoroughly undutiful to your father. So far as I can see, you merely cumber the earth, and there seems no reason why you should stop on it at all."

The Skyscraper and Blimp thought from this that their last hours had come, and livid with horror, goggled at her dumbly, shivering and shaking so violently that soot fell down the chimney, as she went on:

"You have been abominably unkind to Cinderella time after time. I know how you have bullied her. I have seen tears in her eyes because of your cruel and wicked behaviour to her. The treatment you have meted out to her shall be meted out to you. Yes! and more!"

"Wow! Wow!" barked Scraps, gleefully, "that's the stuff to give 'em! And I hope it keeps fine for 'em!"—these

curious expressions being colloquialisms in vogue just then among the illiterate.

"Take them away," she ordered. "Put them in tight boots with three-cornered pebbles and tin-tacks in the linings; find the deepest and darkest of my dungeons, and immure them there with bats, slugs and cock- and hen-roaches for company. Bread and water shall be their diet, with addled eggs for a treat on Sundays. I pronounce my sentence on them to be penal servitude for life!"

"Oh no!" cried tender-hearted Cinders. "Oh no, indeed, dear Godmother! Don't cloud my happiness in this way. It's too awful to think of. Forgive them! I do! I am sure they'll never be unkind or rude any more. Please, *please*, Godmother, be merciful!"

At first the Fairy Queen said "No; certainly not. They must go through it." But after a while, in response to Cinders' earnest pleadings, she relented, saying, rather reluctantly:

"Well, it shall be as you wish—and only because *you* wish it—but on this condition, that they shall both be the lowliest servants in your ménage and do all the humblest work in your Palace; no pay; no tips; and no afternoons or evenings out."

Then turning to the downcast culprits she said threateningly:

"I shall keep my eye on you, and at the slightest sign of insubordination from either of you, into the dungeon you shall both go. So each of you will be answerable for the other. Now, out of my sight; before I change my mind!"

And the Elves looking very grave, not to say severe, pushed the Wotisits, weeping bitterly and snorting through their noses, into the darkness through the clock-door—a tight fit for the Blimp and it never shut again properly afterwards—and we shall see them no more.

Then she said to the King:

"You like the Baron, don't you?"

"Not half I don't! He is a regular sport and a first-class chap," replied his Majesty.

"Very well then; isn't there a high-salaried position of importance in the Palace which you can give him, so as to keep him near you all the time?"

"Rather!" replied the King, "or if there ain't one, I'll make one, and glad to do it, and I speak for you, my dear?"—turning to his wife, who nodded.

"Good!" said the Fairy. Then, addressing Baron Bustup, "You are in difficulties due to bills, are you not?"

"Due is right, madam; overdue, more correct still," answered the Baron. "What with three girls to bring up, the increased expense of living, and the rates and taxes being what they are. . . ."

"I know! I know!" interrupted she. "Well, because you love Cinders and she loves you, I promise you this: post after post shall bring you all your 'accounts rendered' with tuppenny stamps and 'Paid with thanks' on them. Yes! for every penny you owe, including Gubbins' one three four!"

Whereat the Baron, overjoyed, reached out for the nearest elf and kissed her three times, before she could break out of the clinch. The King was about to follow suit with one of her companions, but caught the Queen's eye and thought perhaps not.

"As to Scraps—faithful and devoted friend as he has been," continued the Fairy Queen, "he will go with his mistress and never want for a plate of liver or a bone as long as he lives, and I here and now present him" (suiting the action to the word) "with this magic collar, which will make it a walkover for him if any other dog dares to attack him."

"'Ear! 'Ear!" barked Scraps, making for the door, with the collar round his neck; "See you later! Where's that butcher's dog?" and dashed out.

"Pusskin?" she resumed. "Well, I don't know that I

will do much for her; she's rather catty, I fancy. Still," she mused, " what affection she had for anyone, was for Cinderella, so she shall go to the Palace and look after the mice there. And if she is good she shall have a saucer of cream alternate Thursdays, as a present from me."

Then once more she tenderly embraced Cinders, and speaking slowly, concluded with a charming smile,

" That will be all for this morning, I think. I wish everybody here all happiness and peace of mind all their lives. And so " (with a loving glance at her God-child) " I bid you all farewell. Come Sprites! Let us away. Our work is done."

And with a friendly wave of her hand she and her Fairy suite disappeared. Fffff! Just like that!—presumably through the old Clock, for the door suddenly swung to with a bang; the trumpeters at a sign from the Herald, inflating their cheeks and blaring out " Auld Lang Syne " as a parting salute.

I don't think there's much more to add.

The Wotisits turned over new leaves and made good maids; the tall one being able to look over and dust the tops of high wardrobes without using the steps; and the fat one, becoming slightly slighter in the process, blacked the grates, cleaned the boots, and holy-stoned the front steps; these exercises gradually improving their figures and reducing their rosy noses to something approaching normal tint.

The Baron, besides standing high in his Majesty's opinion, received an appointment as Deputy-Assistant-Boss-of-the-Petty-Cash at a princely remuneration, increasing yearly; earning it too by assiduous attention to his duties; thereby becoming a favourite with the Queen as well. In time he was able to repair Ramshackle Keep, and let it sumptuously furnished every season to various visitors from the States, who admired it, considering it " Too cute for words."

The Prince and Cinders' wedding was one of the grandest ever seen; twenty-four bridesmaids carrying buckets—no,

bouquets—presented by the Bridegroom, and eight pages all dressed in white satin, lots of flags and red carpet; nightly fireworks and illuminations for a week; and the wedding cake nearly as high as St. Paul's Cathedral. And the Prince at the ceremony wore in his buttonhole a Maréchal Niel rosebud, the gift of the bride. What? Yes—the same one, blooming fresh—that is to say, fresh and blooming. What? "How could it after all that time?" *I* don't know. Ask somebody else.

And there was another Ball to celebrate the event, timed to finish at midnight, and called in honour of the bride a 'Cinderella'; and those sort of hops have been called that ever since.

Go on! Say you knew that too.

Cinders and her husband were ever so happy together, and nothing occurred to mar their affection for each other. And I fancy that if we take a peep at them some night when all the servants, including the Wotisits, have gone to bed, and the happy pair can have the kitchen to themselves, we shall hear a conversation something on these lines:

"Cinders, angel!"

"Yes, darling?"

"Let's go down stairs, and let me watch you while you make me one of your golluptious apple-turnovers!"

FINIS.

"Throw me down one too!"

(See p. 232)

THE DJINN

OR

POLITENESS PAYS

A HIGHLY MORAL AND DIVERTING RELATION

OF

Certain Incidents in the career of

ALADDIN

His Origin and his Rise to Wealth and Power as PRINCE AL-AD-DHEEN and his Manner of Life as evolved from Undoubted Sources and set forth in Simple Language and Veracious Detail

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FOREWORD

BEFORE I commence this story I want my young readers to know that some trouble has been taken to get the rights of it. So many versions were put to me when I was too callow to discriminate between truth and fiction, that I got quite confused, and I'm glad I have recently been able to make extended research so that you might benefit thereby, and not be misled as I was.

Some of those versions were most unconvincing, though I didn't realise it till later.

For instance; you may have read, or been told, that Aladdin's first meeting with the Princess was when, accompanied by a numerous retinue, she was on her way to, of all places, the bath! Now I ask you, would anyone—would you? go to all the bother of going out of the front door of your house, preceded by a brass band, and escorted by the cook, housemaid, gardener and odd-job man, together with a mob of interested spectators singing a chorus, merely to walk round to the back and up to the bathroom, for the sole purpose of advertising that you were about to do things with soap and water and a bit of pummice-stone? And under such circumstances, would anyone having gentlemanly instincts obtrude upon a lady at such an ill-chosen moment? No, of course, not! And yet that was precisely what I was expected to believe Aladdin did! Why, I've seen it represented on the stage like that; the Princess surrounded by a crowd of folks, mostly girls in fancy dress—making a splash about going to wash herself! Yes, and Aladdin butting in, without an introduction mind you, with the result that in about ten minutes or less, and in full view of the entire audience

in Drury Lane Theatre, she and he were each cuddling the other and (the Princess quite forgetting what she had come out for) singing a duet about "June" and "Moon" and what-not. Far too quick work. A likely story indeed! Even I began to protest, but a man next me said "Shish!", a large man, so I shished.

However, don't worry about it; for rely upon me, I have got it absolutely right about how the hero and heroine became acquainted.

Then there's the name of the supernatural being—sometimes spelt Genii; at other times Genie, Genei, Jinn, or Jinnee—who looms largely in the following pages. It can't possibly be the first one, because that if anything is the Latin plural of Genius; and there was only one of him, not a regiment. Nor is the last correct—I mean Jinnee; which is French, as in Jinnee sais quoi. The most reliable translators give it as Djinn, pronounced rather like a sneeze, and so, as you will notice, I have followed their lead.

However, the point I want to emphasize is this: namely, how very careful narrators should be, shouldn't they? particularly when seeking to provide information for reception by innocent infant minds. For I'm certain that Deception, practised on the Young, must lead to Crime. Who can doubt that when a boy grows up, to become a veteran of eight or nine, and discovers that in his earlier years he was told all wrong, he will become embittered, and, curling a scornful lip, will mutter sardonically "And these are the very same people who spanked me for sneaking the cold pudding left over from yesterday; I'll show 'em!" And takes his revenge on Society by refusing to eat the fat on his plate, hacking nurse on the shin and sniping the tabby next door with a catapult.

So let me tell you, so that you may not be similarly deceived, that I, yes I myself, have referred to and pored over ancient Papyri in Aspersian, Chaldron, Mongoose, and Gum Arabic.

Foreword

I have been to the British Mausoleum, and, of course, China has provided a saucer information. And finally, to get the correct local atmosphere, and to support exhausted Nature during my laborious task, I dieted myself exclusively on Mandarin oranges, souchong, preserved ginger, sherbet, Turkish delight, and, of course, rice pudding cooked over Chinese fire.

As to the locality of the town referred to, if you will turn up any good atlas of the Celestial Empire, and, covering your eyes with one hand, jab a pin at it with the other, you will see the spot marked on the Map.

In consequence I am able to assure you that the narrative which follows is unimpeachable in its accuracy. And if you say, "I don't believe a word of it; it couldn't happen," I'm sorry but I can't help it.

There were, of course, many other episodes in Aladdin's career, which I have had to skip. Still, I hope I have given you enough to go on with.

You will gather I have made free translations from the classic authorities consulted, and you will notice also that, imitating the Djinn, I am on occasion idiomatic. This was for purposes of expression in the more modern form of English (?) to which your ears are accustomed, especially if you patronise talking pictures of the imported variety.

Finally, if I succeed in interesting you and improving your minds, I shall be more than satisfied. If not, not.

That's that.

THE DJINN

CHAPTER I

Aladdin's Boyhood

THE city of T'Sing-T'Song, nestling on the shore of the Lake of Chin-Chin, at the foot of the How-Hi Mountains, in the Weihoo Province of China, was a town of richness and importance, with a mayor of the municipality, and cram full of mandarins, millionaires, minarets, mosques and mimosa-trees.

There, in one of the humbler streets in the less fashionable quarters, dwelt a poor woman engaged in the useful and necessary occupation of a laundress; taking in for washing and starching the woolly underwear and boiled shirts of the local nobility and gentry. Any time she had to spare she filled in with a job of charing, when she could get it, at a quarter-dinar per diem besides her dinner, and the usual allowance of bohea.

Her name was Mah Jong, Pah Jong having mysteriously disappeared about ten years before and never been seen again; some saying that after a hilarious meeting with cronies at the "Spotted Chow" and being full of liquid cheer, he had probably made the mistake of over-diluting it by falling into the lake. Others that he emigrated in a hurry to Timbuktu, on account of his losing someone else's money on the Peke-racing tracks, through backing runners with only three legs, or which crossed their forefeet.

So I shall always refer to the Widow Jong, as she was

called, as " Mah " ; nice and short and sufficiently indicative. Besides it has an Oriental flavour and is also faintly reminiscent of Ra, the Egyptian Sun-God whom we meet with in crossword puzzles, and seems to fit in nicely somehow.

A very worthy woman ; highly respected by her neighbours, most circumspect in her behaviour ; although prone occasionally to drop her h's, or whatever is the Chinese equivalent. But she did not make much money, and her only son Aladdin —who when we meet him was about fourteen years of age— was a slim youth who, having a healthy appetite, put in some rough work on the foodstuffs when the jong—I should say, gong—rang for meals. And was equally severe on his clothes, hard usage necessitating frequent insertion of patches of various materials, sizes, shapes and colours. Either one of his two suits would have done for a Harlequin, or as the basis of a patch-work quilt.

So it's not surprising that she sometimes felt she could do with a lot more ready money ; and said so. Now and then she was so short of cash for immediate necessities that she had to take the picture of the souls awakening in the parlour— I mean the picture in the parlour of the Soul's Awakening— or the clock off the kitchen-mantelpiece, to an establishment the proprietor of which was an individual with a large super-Roman rose, and addicted to wearing flashy rings and tie-pins, with whom Mah Jong deposited those articles to take care of—paying him about 500 per cent. for doing it, and for a small advance till Saturday.

Aladdin had considerably more alertness of intellect than most of his contemporaries, also a far sharper tongue, so much so, that few of his friends cared to argue with one having the gift of such caustic repartee. In his earlier years he had once tried it on his mother, and answered her back, but she didn't seem to appreciate it and after a stern lecture impressed upon him with the twisted cane gadget she beat the carpets with, he decided he had gone too far and that the practice was an

unhealthy one to indulge in in the home. So he did not repeat it.

He was quite a nice boy on the whole ; a good-hearted lad, very fond of her, hating her having to do so much for so little and always ready to help her ; in consequence being held up to other boys as a pattern of filial rectitude by their parents and to such an extent that they—the boys—resented it ; our friend having had to up-root or amputate more than one rival pig-tail and to give and take several black eyes, before he could put matters on a proper footing with his companions, and so secure their proper respect. But he succeeded in the end, so that at the time this story begins he was top-dog of anyone his own size and fighting weight. If there had been Boy Scouts in those days, he would have been a Troop-leader for sure.

I find no reliable record of his life before the age I have mentioned so I must start there, for that was when he met the Princess Badroulboudour—a dreadful name to write and a tongue-twister to pronounce, and I am glad I shall soon be able to scrap it for something easier.

This was how they became acquainted.

One day when passing the high wall of a garden abutting on the southern road from the suburbs of T'Sing-T'Song, he saw over the top of it the branches of trees loaded with attractive-looking fruit of some kind—I rather fancy it may have been apples. With him, to see anything eatable was to desire to possess and gobble, so after infinite labour he managed to scale the wall, and sitting astride it—thankful it wasn't topped with broken glass—picked all he could get at, reaching out every now and again for another helping ; ejecting right and left pips he had no use for.

And a perfect dream of a lovely almond-eyed little girl in a silken yellow jacket embroidered with peacock's feathers, and wearing muslin trow-trows, playing in the huge garden, saw him and trotted up, saying with a sparkle in her eye,

"What you doin' there, you boy?"

His first impulse was to shin down the wall into the road and skedaddle; but when he saw how pretty she was, how friendly she looked, and that there was no one with her, he took heart and changed his mind, replying rather thickly while hastily choking down a core he had been on the point of discarding, and trying to smile apologetically at the same time:

"Nuthin!"

"Yes, you are, you're pinchin' father's fruit. Throw me down one too."

"And who's he?" asked he, admiring her, complying with her request, with the biggest and ripest fruit within his reach.

"My father? Prince Sing-Lo, of course—Mandrake of the Purple Button and Pink Plus-Fours."

(Mandrake, as you perhaps know, means Viceroy and when entitled to wear those decorations, conferred only by the Emperor, no end of a blood.)

"Ah well," said Aladdin, "I can't help his troubles. But I'm glad I got up here, 'cos if I hadn't, I should have missed a perfect treat. Seein' you, I mean," he added, pushing the point home.

The little maid, blushing, looked up at him saying shyly, "Do you like seein' me?"

"Rather!" said Aladdin, "who wouldn't?"

"Would you like to come nearer?" she asked softly.

Aladdin; (and look here! although I dislike abbreviated Christian names myself, I'm going to save ink and time and shorten that word—unless I forget—and call him by his mother's name for him, namely, Al, which does equally well for A.1. doesn't it? You don't mind, do you? No? very well then).

Al did not hesitate, but was down the wall into that garden in two ticks, and after looking round to make sure they were alone, he said:

"Do you know what I think?"

"No; what?"

"You're the beautifullest thing I have ever seen."

This was the first compliment of the kind ever paid her by anyone of similar age of the opposite sex, and she loved it.

"You may kiss me if you like," she said, very pleased, and with a flush all over her flower-like little face.

Did he like? Oh don't be silly!

He kissed her eleven times in succession, and every time he did so, she gave a happy little sigh and kissed him back, in some cases returning two to his one.

Case of love at first sight on both sides, you see. Call it calf-love if you will—but it's the best and most unselfish love in one's lifetime, so don't let's laugh at them.

"I'll marry you when I grow up," he said.

"'Fraid not, though I would like you to."

"Why not?" he asked, hurt. "Aren't I nice enough?"

"Oh you are!" she replied, "but you see, when I was four years old, I was somethin'ed—betrooted I think it was—to Chop Suey the Gassergene of Tartarica. So I've got to marry him when I'm sixteen. So I can't marry anyone else. So you can't marry me."

"I don't see that," said Al. "How old are you now?"

"I'm eleven," she answered.

"How old is he?"

"Oh! he's an old man; getting on for thirty I think."

"Well, I've five years to do it in, and if something unpleasant doesn't happen to him in that time, call me a liar."

"Why, what can you do?" she asked.

"What can *I* do? What can I *do*? Why I can, er . . . I can, er . . . er . . . H'm! I don't know quite what, but I shall get an idea in good time. By the way, what's your name?"

"Badroulboudour."

"What was that again?"

And she repeated it.

"You aren't weak in the chest, are you?" the boy enquired anxiously.

"No, why?"

"I thought perhaps you were; what you said sounds like whooping-cough. Do you mind spelling it?"

So she did.

"Gosh!" he exclaimed. "What a mouthful! And not half pretty enough for you. I shall call you—let me see—what shall I call you?"

"Call me 'Sweetheart'," murmured the little chit, and I can't think where she got this idea from.

"Too common," he commented. "I'll call you Tweet-tweet; much more original."

"And who are you, you boy?"

"My name's Aladdin; but if you're Tweet-tweet to me I'm Shush-Shush to you from now on; and don't you forget it. And I shall love you for ever-and-ever."

"So shall I you," she whispered. "H'st! I hear footsteps, run! run!" So he had to make himself scarce, and not be slow about it either.

CHAPTER II

The Fat Man

THEY often met by stealth after that, and many a bit of skin did the youngster knock off his knees, scaling the wall on one side and slithering down the other. These meetings resulted in their getting fonder and fonder of each other; he devoted to her and hating the idea of her marrying anyone else, and she impressing upon him that he must not carry out his repeated threats to obliterate her betrothed husband too soon, because if anything fatal happened to him before the five years were up, she might be rushed into pairing off with someone else instead. Which wouldn't do at all.

This affectionate friendship went on for over four years, and how no one, not even his mother (the little Princess hadn't one), found them out, I can't imagine. She—I mean Tweet-Tweet, not Mah—grew straight as a willow and lovelier and more like a film star every day (minus the toothy smile usually worn in the picture papers), demurely regarding the world with clear and kindly eyes, yet a little sadly and with a cloud on her brow as her sixteenth birthday came nearer and nearer. Al, too, filled out, though still retaining a becoming slimness, and grew taller and handsomer as the years passed, until the dreaded fifth year was nearly up, and he was getting more and more harassed, frantic at the thought of losing her. But had no opportunity of doing anything about it, the Gassergene not ever coming near T'Sing-T'Song all the time.

Then there came a day when wonderful things began to happen.

The Djinn

He was mooching round outside his mother's house with his hands in his pockets—having nothing else to put in them—when he saw a fat man with no sideways. A slinky-looking fat man, with a hooked nose, furtively glancing about him as he approached, though pretending to ooze geniality and what-not—all sham—at every pore. A *very* fat man—not a China-man—who, judging by his grimy hands and face, looked as if he'd lost his only piece of soap years ago ; habited in a ragged and dirty dressing-gown-looking thing, with wide trousers tucked into a pair of shocking old boots down at heel and his feet sticking out of where the toe-caps ought to have been ; with a bedraggled old Turban on his matted hair, and altogether resembling an oriental scarecrow broken loose.

This mountain of flesh was, as you will see, dressed that way for disguise ; for, as it turned out, he had plenty of money in his purse.

Well, this very fat man cocked an eye at our hero, deciding he was just about the right thinness for the purpose he had in view. So first giving a sly look round to see that nobody else was within hearing, he accosted him, suppressing (when he didn't forget) a pronounced natural lithp—I mean lisp.

" Oy ! young man. Howth the world uthing you ? " said he, his fat face wreathed in what was intended to be a kind smile. " Howth your Father ? "

" Oy ! to you—with knobs on. Rotten. Haven't got one," replied Al, dealing with each remark in the order named, rather annoyed at being addressed so familiarly by a complete stranger and one in such a dilapidated get-up.

" Well, then ; how's the boy to-day ? " said the other.

" No better for seeing you, Bulgy-bags," replied Al.

The other, preserving his air of urbanity with some difficulty, replied,

" Smart lad ! I like a boy with spirit ! What's your name ? "

" Maybe its Tonking ; perhaps Foo-chow ; so you can call me Hong-Kong. What's yours ? "

" Abanazar," replied the fat man, this pert reply causing a flicker of annoyance to pass over his broad face.

" I don't get it. Did you say a bun raiser ? "

" You've got it wrong," said the obese one with some acerbity, and spelt it out for him, his hand itching to connect with Al's ear.

" Sure t'aint Ikestein ? Anyways, we've no empty bottles or jam-jars, nor chairs to mend," said the young man, " so tie a piece of string to yourself and pull for the shore."

" You're pretty fresh, ain't you ? " snapped the portly one through clenched teeth, swallowing his growing irritation but feeling the strain acutely. " However, never mind ; would you like to earn some money ? "

" Does a duck like to swim ? " asked Al, putting his hand out with a grin, " How much ? "

" Five taels of silver is what I'm offering."

Our young friend gaped. The sum seemed stupendous to him.

" Five taels ! Crikey ! What for ? "

" Oh ! a mere nothing. You see it's like this. I want someone not quite so fa . . . I should say someone slighter than I am, to look for something in a hole in the ground. Quite easy."

" Say that again slowly," said Aladdin. " Are you a mining prospector ? "

" No ; I'm a Sorcerer."

" What ! One of those conjuring fellers who do the three-card-trick ? "

" Certainly not ! I am a genuine Magician of wonderful and terrible abilities ; and powers far far beyond what you're thinking of."

" Then," said Aladdin, " if you're a sorcerer, why can't you allee samee sorcerise what you want for yourself ? "

" Because even I, powerful as I am, have my limitations, and until I've got what I want you to look for, my style though nearly perfect, isn't quite."

"Then the job is worth a lot more than five piecee silver," said Aladdin knowingly. "Put a one on the left side of the five, and I'm not saying."

"What wath that you thaid?" growled Abanazar, irritably, almost gnashing his teeth, his lisp coming well up to the surface; for if anything more than another was displeasing to him, it was parting with money, so he found Al's remark highly distasteful.

"I said, 'make it fifteen taels and I'll think about it.'"

"You and your fifteen taels," snarled the other, "you're a dathed sight too greedy, you are; it 'th out of the queth-tion."

"Greedy! I like that! I should have said twenty—I meant twenty," was the young man's response.

"T-t-t-twenty T-t-taels! Do you dare to think you can bargain with ME?"

"I'm not bargaining; I'm telling you."

"Do you know," said Abanazar, turning purple right round to the back of his neck, "I could change you thith very moment into a wart-hog if I chothe?"

"Twenty taels or nothing," replied Al, "and if you give me any more lip, I'll call a cop, and you can magicalize him as well; though when I come to think of it, the one on our beat is rather like a wart-hog already."

Well, after a goodish bit more of this back-chat, and exchanging rude and unpleasant remarks, Abanazar, reluctant to attract attention by negotiating with anyone else, compromised for fifteen taels of silver and a curious heavy antique Ring he was wearing, and which Aladdin insisted on having thrown in as part of the bargain. The self-styled Magician, confident about somehow getting it back eventually, passed it over, and Aladdin transferred it to his own finger, intending later on to present it to Tweet-Tweet.

Then Abanazar explained what he wanted him to do, which was to oil through a narrow cleft in the rocky How-hi

Mountains about two miles from the city, and go down a narrow passage into a cave deep below the surface of the earth. In the cave was an old brass lamp—Abanazar remarking airily "of little value and of no use to anybody" and Al replying "was that so? then what did he want it for?" Abanazar's only come-back to that being, "You HAVE got a nerve. Never you mind."

"How do you know it's there?" asked Aladdin.

"That's a secret and nothing to do with you!"

"But if you're a magician," persisted the lad, "why can't you say 'Hey presto!' or 'Hi-cockalorum,' and get in that way?"

"Because though I can close the crevice, I can't make it wide enough for me to go through," adding in a lower tone, but not so low that Al's sharp ears did not catch the words, "I could if I had the lamp." Then raising his voice, "anything else you want to know?" he ended nastily.

"Well it all sounds fishy to me. However, I'm on; but you must wait till I've told my mother where I'm going," said Al, not too easy in his mind about the whole affair.

"Oh, very well," said Abanazar with a nod, guessing his young friend had suspicions about him, and making a virtue of a necessity.

When Mah heard about the project and knew there was a windfall of money hanging on to it, and had pushed the blind to one side to peer at the magician leaning against the wall of the house opposite, she thought that although she herself wouldn't care to meet him in a lonely road on a dark night unless she had some mustard gas, a stick or two of dynamite and an elephant-gun, yet she felt sure her boy could look after himself all right, and told him he could take on the job but he must get back s'quick s'could.

So off the two went; and in due course arrived at the rocks, where Abanazar pointed out amid a grove of trees the narrow opening, and it *was* narrow; so narrow that Al saw that if he

was to get through at all he would have to edge in sideways, breathing small. It was an eerie spot. Lonely and desolate. No human beings near. No cattle or sheep, nor even a bird, in sight. Quite the sort of place to give you cold creeps particularly if you were alone except for being in doubtful company, as Aladdin was. So will you kindly shudder a little? It encourages me to go on. Thanks.

Then after another protracted wrangle as to whether he was or was not to have all the cash in advance, the Magician, almost with tears in his eyes, agreed to hand out five taels on account. And Aladdin, not being able to raise him higher, decided to accept that as a deposit, took the coins, and began to work his way in, by slow degrees wriggling from sight.

Abanazar had originally never intended to pay him anything at all; his scheme being to get the lamp handed out to him and then, with its magic aid to close the cleft so that Al would be shut in, lost to mortal eye, and starve to death. Things, however, weren't working out as planned, for there was this snag, namely, that Aladdin had got the Ring—an important factor as you will hear, while he himself had not got the lamp. He had tried to persuade Aladdin to hand it back to him before descending into the depths of the earth, but the young man had said he wasn't having any, because he'd got so fond of Abby-Babby—as he called him—he preferred to have the ring on his finger "as a reminder of their very pleasant meeting." So it went into the cave with him. From which cause sprang great events, but you must wait until I get to that part, and not bustle me.

We will now follow our hero, sometimes bent double, sometimes on his hands and knees, and more than once crawling on his tummy, down the narrow twisty passage. Eventually, after about half a mile of laborious downward progress, he found it widened out a little until it terminated in the cave as already described to him. This cave was the size of a big one and full of great jagged rocks scattered about and piled

up one on another, against which, until his eyes became accustomed to the dimness, Aladdin bumped or barked his shins several times as he groped his way along. There was a very faint light coming from a small opening high up above his head as he peered about looking for the lamp, rather wondering what mystic powers his fat friend expected it would confer on him.

Meanwhile Abanazar, rather upset, was deeply cogitating how, when he got hold of the Lamp, to recover the Ring, there being good reasons why both articles should be in his own possession at the same time. And his eyes, roving the ground in thoughtful meditation, lit on some chunks of granite lying about loose. His face cleared; he saw the solution of his dilemma; and so picking up one of handy size, he stood close by the entrance to the cavern, with the intention of stunning Aladdin with it as the latter, bearing the lamp, worked head foremost out of the crevice. After which it would be an easy matter to pull the ring off his finger, collar the lamp, and with their united magic aid, either make him permanently unconscious or else change him into one of those unpleasant looking creatures one finds when one turns over a flat stone. So behold this obese old ruffian, with the piece of rock poised in his hand, waiting for his murderous opportunity. Another shudder, please.

Inside the cave, after a long search, Aladdin spotted in a niche the lamp he was looking for. An insignificant brass one, much dented, very tarnished; the sort of thing he said to himself, "he wouldn't be found dead with." He grabbed it, and, eager to be away from such gloomy surroundings, commenced to retrace his steps by the way he had come. At first he held it in his hands, but coming to the narrow bits where he had to crawl flat, he gripped the handle between his teeth, worming noiselessly along until he saw the welcome light of day glimmering through the entrance from the outer world. At this point—he didn't quite know why, native

caution perhaps—he put it down where it could not be seen or reached by the fat man, and then peeping towards the exit, by good luck he happened to see Abanazar's uplifted arm with the chunk of rock at the end of it!

This made him pause and think a bit! He was shrewd enough to guess what was in the fat man's mind, and at once took counter measures. There was a piece of branch from one of the trees, lying within the mouth of the cavern, so cautiously taking it up, he hung his little black pork-pie hat on the end of it and thrust it just out of the hole. Whereupon Abanazar made a tremendous swipe at it with his weapon, knocking the cap off, and jarring Al's arm up to the elbow.

"Whatever was that?" asked Aladdin innocently.

Abanazar, swallowing his annoyance at his failure, replied in honeyed accents, "Nothing; only a piece of stone falling from overhead; it's all right now."

"Dear, dear!" replied Al, winking to himself, "and it might have hit you! Hadn't you better stand a little further away? Another lump might fall, and I should hate it if you got hurt!"

"Never mind that," said Abanazar, but stepping back a few paces, "have you got the lamp?"

"Yep!"

"Hand it out then!"

"I beg yours?"

"Hand it out and look sharp!"

"Why the hurry?"

"Come on! don't thtand inthide there athking thilly quethtionth!" cried Abanazar, much annoyed, and letting his lisp have full scope.

"Not ask questions? But I shall! Only one though. Where are the other ten pieces?"

"I'll give 'em to you when I get the lamp."

"And you'll get the lamp when you cash up after I get out," replied Aladdin, "and not before; sure as my name's

Aladdin. So put that in your hubble-bubble and smoke it!"

"Rash boy! daring to beard me! You've got the five taels, give me the lamp and you shall have the rest; and—and—five more for my ring back."

"Only five?" asked Aladdin, in a surprised tone; "Is that all it's worth?"

"Well, ten then!" howled the fat man, in his anger and impatience capering about as much as his girth and weight permitted.

"That's better! and very kind of you! oh ve-r-ry kind indeed, Abby-babby dear; but I'm taking no chances. A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush. So I'll have cash down if you don't mind."

"But I do mind! For two pins I would invoke the powers I possess and close the cleft and shut you in for ever!"

"I haven't got two pins; but if I had they'd do you no good. For if you shut me up, you wouldn't get the lamp at all. And you'd be five taels worse off!"

Abanazar, by now positively dithering with baffled rage at his bluff being called, completely lost his wool; and as is always the case when people part with their self control, he acted without thinking, going off the deep end and making the bloomer of a lifetime.

"That will be enough from you!" he bellowed, and, anger giving him strength, he heaved up another huge jagged stone, and hurled it with all his might at Aladdin just about to emerge warily from the crevice; and with such force that if it had hit him, there would have been a job for the undertaker. But it missed him by not more than an inch, for Al drew back when he saw it coming, and all it did was to wedge itself tightly in such a way that the entrance was firmly bottled up with an immovable cork which couldn't be crawled under or climbed over.

Then the pseudo-magician strode away, wheezing horrible curses on Aladdin, the lamp, and everything to do with

T'sing-T'song. A nasty fellow, don't you think? Anyhow our hero was glad to see him go.

At first. But he soon realized that all his strength was unavailing, especially hampered by a cramped position which only permitted the use of one hand, to shift the jammed lump of stone; and at last he desisted from useless effort, appalled at the dreadful situation in which he found himself.

"Of all the rotten tricks!" he groaned. "Oh, Tweet-Tweet; Tweet-Tweet; I shall never get out! I shall never see you again!" And he even howled "Abby! come back!" but Abanazar either could not or would not hear him.

And I don't blame him for temporarily losing heart. Nor would you, I should think; faced as he was with a lingering death. I can see you are looking green with fright at the thought of his horrible fate!

And I'll take it as a compliment to my graphic description if you'll burst into tears.

Thank you very much.

CHAPTER III

Enter the Djinn

THEN pulling himself together, Aladdin remembered the hole at the top of the cave, and by great exertion squeezed his way back to the cavern—picking up the lamp en route—to see if he could somehow climb up to the opening and get out that way. But although he piled some of the rocks one on top of the other, the rest were too heavy and beyond his strength to lift even an inch off the ground. So the hole was still far too high above his head for him to get anywhere near it.

At that his courage gave way again, the awful idea of slowly starving to death in that dark and dismal place giving him horrible jim-jams.

"Oh! may the Gods preserve me!" he murmured desperately with his hands clasped together. And as he did so, he unconsciously rubbed Abanazar's ring.

And do you know what happened then?

Why! a bang, a blinding flash of light, and a suffocating smell of burnt feathers making Al cough and his eyes water. And there, standing close by him, in a helmet like a fireman's, and armour—somewhat the worse for wear—with a sort of phosphorescent haze on it, was a gigantic and most ferocious figure of a man wearing an unkempt straggly beard, badly moth-eaten, and having a horn on his forehead like a unicorn's, and two terrible fangs, one at each end of his mouth. Huge pointed ears flapped as he moved, and his swarthy face was the shape, and wore the expression, of a hippopotamus with stomach trouble.

Would you mind shuddering once more here? Thanks, awfully.

Aladdin, horror-struck, felt his knees knocking together, and he'd have bolted if he could. But knowing there was no place to bunk to, he stood his ground, keeping a sharp look-out on his visitor.

But although so formidable in appearance the latter bowed low from his middle, both claw-like hands to his forehead, saying in a deep voice which seemed to rise from somewhere near his ankles, in respectful, not to say humble, tones:

"Salaams! Oh, Honourable Master."

Whereat Aladdin, a little but not much reassured, began to regain some of his usual perkiness, and replied, as soon as he could speak for coughing, in a trembling voice,

"How-dye-do: er—er—I ho—ho—hope you're quite wer—wer—well. I her—her—heard y-y-you knock, but I di—di—didn't see you come in."

"No one ever does," replied the vision. "I am the Djinn of the Omnipotent Talisman, the Slave of the Ring of Desire, and come and go instantaneously at the bidding of him who wears it, provided he is otherwise entitled by possession of the Lamp of Miracles."

"And what have you come for this time?" asked Aladdin, emboldened by the other's pacific demeanour, but not quite understanding what the other was talking about.

"To do whatsoever my master shall command."

"You mean that really?"

"I do, oh honourable sir."

"Well, I'm more than glad to see you. Shake!" and Aladdin put out his hand, but rather gingerly, for he was not even yet feeling too confident about his terrible looking vis-a-vis. But the Djinn drew back from the proferred hand, observing with great humility,

"It is not meet that thy slave should be permitted so great a privilege. Mine it is but to hear and obey."

"Well, at least tell me your name and what seance you've cut loose from?"

"Oh, master, I thy servant bear the name of Bung Ho; and am the Arch-Superhet of the Howling Heterodyne. I come from no human gathering such as that to which thou hast alluded. Save when summoned, I am imprisoned in an amphora in the Sea of Eblis; and oh boy!" he went on, shedding his stilted method of address, "the relief when I'm asked for, and the cork blows out, and I can squeeze through the neck and stretch myself, you'd hardly believe. I shifts quickly, I does; and that's why nobody don't never see me come in." Then reverting to the more flamboyant style, he continued, "Already possessing the Lamp of Miracles, thou had'st rubbed the Ring of Desire. Thereby thou calledst me, a summons I dare not disobey. What are my honourable master's wishes?"

"But what can you do for me? Here I'm bottled up in this mausoleum and can't get out. I'm a-lad-in all right; so what's the use?"

"Dost thou indeed wish to return to the world of men?" asked the Djinn.

"Indeed I dost—do, I mean."

"Thy desire is granted," replied the Djinn; and lo! and behold! Al found himself outside the cave, gulping down the fresh sweet air, the Djinn striking an attitude as much as to say "houp la!"

"And very nice too," said Al, inhaling another mouthful of the outdoors, "although I don't know how you did it."

"Pooh! a mere nothing," said the Djinn with a smile which made him look rather more frightful than before.

"Well, I'm very much obliged to you. Yes, indeed I am. Very much. That *was* a narrow squeak. Thanks awfully. Here—put this in your pocket; if you've got one," he added, holding out one of the taels.

What was his surprise when the Djinn went "Kic! Kic!"

and, doubled up with laugher, stamped about holding his sides and "ho! ho-ing!" fit to burst.

"Something's tickling you," said Al. "What is it?"

"Ha! ha! I who am all-powerful and control all the riches in the world, am offered a piece of money. He! he! that's a good joke, that is."

"Sorry," said Al, thinking he had not been generous enough, "I'll make it two."

"No! No!" said the Djinn. "Not that at all. I don't want your money. Tee-hee! I've not had such a good laugh for years! But," he went on, in more sober tone, "I like your spirit. The things I've done for other masters and never got a 'Thank you!' You're a gentleman you are. You were ready to shake my hand. No one else ever was. It showed nice feeling on your part. I appreciate it. I can see we shall get on together. So long as I serve you, I shall do so willingly. Yes, and go out of my way to do it. Count on me in every way all the time. Now," he concluded, "what's the next article?"

"Well," said Al, "I was sent into that cave to look for a lamp. I found it all right, but I've left it behind. What can you do about that?"

"You speak of the Lamp of Miracles? Behold it at your feet."

"Well I'm blessed!" said Al looking down and picking it up. "How *do* you manage these things?"

"Never mind how I do; I do, don't I? Now, lemme-tellyasuthin, whenever you desire my presence you need only rub the ring and I will be with you as you do so, visible or invisible, according to your whim, and ready to do your bidding, but let me give you a tip straight from the stable; have the ring and the lamp always in safe keeping. Never part with either. Lamp by itself no bon, only with the ring. ring by itself no bon either, only with the lamp, so don't leave 'em lying about. Want anything else? No? Then I'll be getting back to my jug. So long!"

There was the Djinn ! . . . Mah . . . falling backwards into an empty clothes-basket.

(See p. 249)

The Djinn

And vanished as he spoke.

Aladdin, pondering over these mysteries, betook himself home, meeting his mother on the step just as she, worried about his long absence, was going to call at the local police station. So, having no secrets from her (except about Tweet-Tweet), he told her all that had happened to him, a recital punctuated by her astonished exclamations of "Lawks!" "Oh my!" "You don't say so!" "Good 'eavens!" and such like. And they examined the lamp—both thinking it a cheap, second-hand looking affair, not much of an ornament and unlikely to be of use—and also the ring, which looked like gold, but Mah, shaking her head suspiciously, said she bet it was only brass.

Hungry after his adventures, and mentioning it, Al was dismayed when his Mother exclaimed:

"There now! What with fussing about you, and looking for a collar that's missing, I clean forgot about supper. And the shops shut and all. There's nothing in the house to eat and I've even run out of tea-siftings!"

Then her son had a brain-wave, and he said to her:

"Why, here's a chance to see if Bung-Ho meant what he said," and tucking the lamp under his arm he gave the ring a rub on the palm of his hand. And just as Mah was sniffing and saying, "Don't I smell onions . . .?" Zing! Bang! There was the Djinn! right on the spot, kow-towing! Mah, with the shock of his appearance, falling backwards into an empty clothes-basket, remaining fixed with her head out over one end and her feet sticking out over the other, wrinkling her nose, until her son hoisted her up, and she ran to open the back-door, to let out the choky sulphury fumes.

"What willst thou?" enquired the Djinn. "And whatever thou willstest, it shall be willsted."

Al replied "Dinner for two, please; hors d'œuvres to nuts. How about it?"

"I obey. Where do you keep the knives and forks?"

"H'm," said Al, "we're rather short on forks, and some have only one prong; and not too many knives. And I used all the chop-sticks to light the copper fire s'morning. You must please provide the cutlery, *and* glass."

"I hear and obey," said the Djinn.

And trotted into the scullery and in a twinkling came out with an ebony and silver table laden with tureens of real turtle and birds'-nest soups, and other delicious dishes; and lots of stone gingerbeer and sherbet, placing it between the clothes-horse and the wringing-machine.

"'Ere!" said Mah, gaping at it. "Whassat? Wherjer find it?"

But the Djinn only smiled and made no answer. Then Mah, already astounded, caught her breath when she saw the plates and other magnificent table appointments were of pure gold inlaid with silver. She felt she must be dreaming; but being quite ready for a bite herself, didn't bother any more about first causes, but thankfully, if somewhat dazedly, accepted the situation and fell to, the Djinn hovering round with a napkin over his arm, changing the plates as required; Mah having to hold her nose to prevent herself sneezing when he came round her as they sat on up-turned wash-tubs—Aladdin not having requisitioned chairs. And there was little conversation except an occasional muttered request from Aladdin of "Pass the salt, please," and Mah's observations, in reference to a dish of caviare: "These is the littlest peas I ever seen"; and having sampled an olive under the impression it was a gooseberry, warning her son to "give them plums a miss, 'cos they gorn orf a lot."

At the end of the meal, Mah said to the Djinn, "You can clear away now, Bo Hung" (not having got the name right), but he took no notice of her. Instead, he looked enquiringly at Al, who nodded, and the table and contents were no longer visible, nor the Djinn. Not a sign to show they had ever been there.

"I wish he hadn't gone so quickly," said Mah thoughtfully. "I wanted to ask him if I could keep one of them gold dishes. I'd have loved to have seen Uncle MacAbraham's phiz when I took it to him to ask for a bit on it until Monday."

"I never thought of that," said her son. "Still, there's plenty of time. I fancy we are on to a good thing here, and we'll keep it moving." At that moment he saw Abanazar in the street and dived under a heap of window-curtains waiting to be cleaned, hoarsely whispering to Mah:

"Quick! Go and ask him what he's done with me. Don't let him see me! Make a row about it so that the constable on duty will take notice. I want that fellow out of the town. Go on! He can't hurt you; he hasn't got his ring nor the lamp!"

Mah was quick on the uptake, and with a screech like an engine going into a tunnel, dashed out yelling:

"Oh you wicked old Geyser! What you done with my beautiful boy? You old sinner, you! You took him away and he ain't come back! Help! Murder-r-r-r! Thieves!"

Abanazar, staggered at this unexpected verbal onslaught, backed down the street like a porpoise chased by a sand-eel, followed by Mah (with one eye on the policeman) shrieking at the top of her voice that Abanazar had kidnapped and murdered her son. People looked out of their windows and poured out of their doors, and Aladdin being a favourite, an angry crowd soon gathered; a suggestion of lynching Abanazar meeting with considerable support, one man with a bit of clothes-line putting a noose round Abanazar's neck just as the muscular Muzzleman bobby came along.

"What's all this 'ere?" he asked majestically, and everyone began to shout at him at once, all giving different versions. He was at first inclined to arrest Abanazar, but finding there was no direct evidence against him he said something about "them boys always turns up", and decided merely to see he was booted out of the town. So he collared hold of Abanazar's

arm, the latter blue with funk and positively shrinking, as far as such a fat man could shrink, with terror.

" And don't let me see you messing round 'ere no more," said the constable to him, as he propelled him through the East Gate and banged the door on him, " or I'll take you before the Mandrake for a dose of the Cangue, so I will; now 'op it!"

Abanazar did not dawdle but 'opped it instanter, though the crowd, disappointed at such a tame ending, seemed to think the rope might as well have been used—being so handy.

CHAPTER IV

Great Changes

MAH, much elated at the success of her first appearance as an actress in a tragedy, or any other, part, returned, chuckling over the upshot of the affair, and plunging into a vivid description; but what was her surprise to find her son taking but a languid interest in her story, sitting in a chair with his head buried in his hands, looking like a monkey which has bitten on a bad nut.

"Why, whatever's wrong?" she asked.

"Oh!" replied Al, "I thought old Gasbags was the worse kind of mutt ever, but I'm the muttiest mutt that ever mutted."

"Why?"

"I can't think how I came not to think of it."

"Think of what?" asked Mah, puzzled.

"It just shows how one can lose one's presence of mind when one is concentrating on absence of body."

"Oh, whatever are you babbling about?" cried she, full of maternal solicitude, and wondering if his adventures had turned his brain, or whether that extra glass of sherbet had been too much for him.

"Why, don't you see? If I had only rubbed the ring our friend Bung Ho would have come along and dealt with him. He probably would have shut Abanazar up in the earth somewhere, the same as he did me. Now of course the old villain has gone, and goodness knows what mischief he may be up to bye-and-bye."

"Shouldn't worry about that," said Mah. "Never trouble

trouble till trouble troubles you. I feel it in my bones that he will come to a nasty sticky end, anyhow. So let's forget him."

" P'raps you're right, and I hope you are. But I do think I missed a chance there."

He woke up next morning with a Great Thought for the Day in his mind.

He rubbed the ring, humming, " Djinn a body meet a body, comin' thro' the Rye," and in popped Bung-Ho, bowing respectfully and bringing with him his customary powerful aroma.

" 'Lo ! " said Al. " Slap-bang ! here we are again ! "

" Yea, verily, oh master, doth thy unworthy slave attend to obey thy honourable requests. What are the desires and aspirations of the lord of my . . . "

" Look here," said Al. " You puzzle me. Sometimes you talk as if you were educated, and sometimes you don't. Why is it ? "

" My Lord hath then observed that I speak, as it were, with two voices ? In good sooth I . . . "

" Yes, yes, I have ; what bothers me is the reason. I never know when you are going to talk as I talk, or above my head."

" Master," he rumbled, taking a long breath, " for thousands of years had I employed no other than the speech of culture and refinement, befitting my years and character, but in the course of the last two centuries or so, by reason of my somewhat forbidding exterior—being even referred to as ' The Bogey-Man '—I have on occasion been invoked to repress ebullience of disposition and to ameliorate incorrigibility of behaviour in those of immature age. Also have I sojourned in the United States, the breeding ground of distorted idiom, from which great country, where we were all guys together " (here he removed the horn from his forehead, raising it high above his head and replacing it with a respectful air) " abnor-

malities of oral expression are disseminated over the face of the habitable globe. In such wise hath it come to pass that from both sources I have acquired a certain elasticity of diction, which, though abhorrent to my finer susceptibilities, yet springs to my lips through inadvertence, unless I remember beforeha——"

"Oh, all right! all right!" broke in Al, who had been listening in wide-eyed admiration but somewhat impatiently, "I like your long words, they're fine, but save them up until I have more time. I wish I could talk like that; but I never got beyond words of two syllables at Board School. However, what I'm getting at is this; did you really mean all you said outside the cavern?"

"Verily—I mean, yes, of course I did, every word. Have I not already proved it?"

"Yes, indeed you have, up to a point. But what is the limit? Can you give me anything—yes ANYthing I ask for?"

"Set me any task which seemeth good to thee and I shall hope by strict attention to business to merit a continuance of the esteemed patro——"

"Oh less of it, less of it," interrupted Al. "What I want to know is this; 'sposing I ask you to fit me out in toggery befitting (your word, that) a person of high rank. Could you do that?"

"Is such the wish that inspires thy honourable soul? That is to say, is that what you're getting at?"

"Yes, I want to see myself in decent clothes for once."

"'Tis done!" said the Djinn.

In a jiffy Al stood in his humble attic magnificently attired, in velvet and satin tunic and trousers, with gorgeous shoes, sun-hat and silken umbrella all to match, and his pigtail neatly plaited with a gold ribbon ending in a jewelled bow. He looked at himself in the broken bit of hand-glass which served him as a mirror, extremely pleased with the effect—similar to that of a Mandarin in his Sunday-go-to-Meetings.

"Right! I see you are as good as your word. Now make me as I was before."

And it was done.

"And there's another thing. Is it absolutely necessary you should bring that—er—er—smoky—er—scent with you, every time I call you?"

"Master," he replied apologetically, "every Djinn that ever was has had his own peculiar odour. . . ."

"Yes," said Al. "At least, I know you have. Can't you tone it down a bit?"

"Perhaps because I've been so long incarcerated, my aura may suggest the smell of burnt fish-bones and garlic. But, oh master, it will wear off in time."

"I don't mean to be offensive; I don't mind it myself, but—well, for instance, my mother doesn't quite like it. It tickles her throat."

"Be patient, master. It will grow less as the days pass."

"I hope you don't mind my mentioning it? I should hate it if you did, because you're a fine chap, Soupy. Though you're quicker at doing things than talking about them. You don't mind my calling you 'Soupy', do you? Especially after that last night's blow-out—that turtle consommé was jolly good. But, as it strikes me, 'Bung-Ho' doesn't sound nice to me, while 'Howling Superhet' is rather formal between us, and a mouthful too."

"Call me by whatever name thou willst, oh master! It will be nothing to what others have called me from time to time, when with inconvenient results to them, I have taken an interest in their carryings-on."

"Splendid! Then, Soupy, I'm going to give you a task really worth while; much bigger than any you have done so far. Listen! 'Sposing a chap is in love with a girl . . .?"

"The loves of humans interest me not," interrupted the Djinn. "I seek for no reasons for commands. I hear and

obey. So cut the cackle and come to the 'osses. What is it this time?"

"That's the way to talk!" commented Al. "Well now listen carefully. Outside the town on the Southern Road is a large piece of well-wooded meadowland about two miles by three, with a board up, on which is written 'To be let or sold.' I want that piece of land, timber and all, for my very own for keeps. On it, I want a real slap-up Palace built, far finer than the Mandrake's close by; one room right at the top to revolve and have twenty-four windows in it so that I can sit in the sun all day if I want to, without going out. All the rooms, say about 150, expensively furnished; a stud of fifty pedigree riding and driving horses in the stables; also ostlers to mind them; half a dozen chariots of gold ornamented with diamonds and six others of silver inlaid with ivory. Also coachmen of course, handsomely liveried. The house to be fully staffed with servants, from the butler right down to the turnspit and the boy who cleans the boots. And lastly, twenty-five million taels to be lodged with the T'sing-T'song Banking Corporation to my credit, and no questions asked. I don't want much, do I?"

"Done," said the Djinn, who had been ticking off these items on his fingers.

"Good; then go to it!"

"I said 'done' oh honourable honourable," replied the Djinn, "and it is already done—as you spoke."

"What? Everything I mentioned?"

"Betake thyself—I should say—go along the road *now*, and you will see for yourself the Palace at this moment. And call at the Bank on the way back for the cheque book waiting for you."

"Good gracious! I never thought it could be managed so quickly, especially the banking business. You're a marvel!" The Djinn bowed and simpered in a pleased manner. "Well, come downstairs with me and we will have a chat with mother."

The Djinn

Mah was laying the table for breakfast, ironing collars, and mangling a table cloth, all at the same time.

" Stop that, Mother ! " said her son. " You're never going to do another stroke of that sort of work for the rest of your life ! "

" Eh ? " said Mah, and turning to the Superhet with her apron to her nose, greeted him with " Mornin' ; you've happened round early, ain't yer ? Now, my boy, what were you saying about work ? "

" I said, no more laundry work for you, old dear."

" Don't make me laugh," said Mah, " I've got a sore lip."

" Soupy," said Al with a roguish wink, " clothe mother and me in attire suitable to our position as owners of the Palace."

" Has the boy gone mad ? " queried his mother, and then cried, " 'Ere ! what's this ? What you doin' ? "

For as she spoke her working clothes took wing and in their place she found herself habited from top to toe in rich brocades and metal cloth, studded with precious stones of every kind and looking ever so splendid. But, instead of appearing pleased, she promptly had a fit of hysterics until her son and the Djinn between them restored her to her usual sound mental balance. When she had recovered and got past the sobbing and hiccoughing stage, Al, himself in equally handsome and decorative apparel, said to her :

" You and I are rich, very rich, thanks to Soupy here, and we have our own Palace to live in, with servants to wait on us and everything."

" What me ? In a Palace ? With servants an' all ? Go on, you were always one for a bit of fun. Is this where I laugh ? "

" You don't believe me ? Come along, and I'll show it you this minute ! "

" Bless me ! " cried Mah agitatedly, " I can't go outdoors dressed like this ! I should feel ever so silly and confused. Besides, whatever will the neighbours think ? "

"What does that matter?" answered Al. "You've done with all this—and oh, Mother, I'm so happy to think you need never turn a mangle or bend over a washtub again, so long as you live."

"Well, but then what about the week's laundry, and the money for it?"

"I'll take the laundry round and get the cash, Mother; not that we want it, but p'raps it will look well and attract less remark from people if we finish up the business properly. And as for your not liking to go out dressed as you are—I'll tell you what. We'll wait until it's dark and then slip out and take possession of our new home. Thank you, Soupy, that's all for the present. I'll Ring for you—he! he! that's a good joke!—when I want you."

After the Djinn had gone, Mah put a counterpane over her fine clothes, for fear, as she said, "she might muss 'em up." And Aladdin changed into his old suit and (merely to please Mah who was worrying about it) went out to deliver the clean linen to their patrons, returning with what was equivalent to nineteen shillings and fourpence ha'penny and a dickey returned by a customer as being insufficiently starched.

And when evening fell, they stole out furtively, with cloaks on, and went to the Palace. And Mah, at her first sight of its imposing proportions, was so overcome, that her son had the greatest difficulty in persuading her to go into it; and when she did enter and noticed the size of the Grand Salon she remarked that if her bedroom was of similar dimensions the first thing she had to do was to buy a scooter or a pair of roller-skates.

I won't bore you with a description of the Palace itself—you go and study pictures of Blenheim, Eaton Hall, and the London County Council headquarters, throw them all into one, and imagine what it looked like for yourself. Nor shall I say anything about the wonderful furnishings. You can look at any illustration of Chinese art and whatever pleases

your artistic eye and you think suitable, you can put in the rooms without any help from me. It saves me a lot of trouble and will give you something to do. All I will say is that every inside wall was covered with goldleaf, with so many precious stones of great value worked into the interior decorations, they might have been ten a penny. Which gives you some idea, what?

The following morning Al spoke to his mother:

"Mother dear, I want to tell you something."

"Yes, Al, I'm listening."

"There was once a boy who met a little girl. She was far above him in every way; but she loved him, and he has adored her ever since. The boy was me."

"Lawks!" exclaimed Mah with a pain at her heart as she realised that in his she no longer held first place; "and you never told your old mother. Now I suppose you don't love me no more?"

"Mother, that's not fair; have you noticed anything like that during the last five years? You know you haven't. I didn't tell you before because it seemed rather hopeless. First because of her rank; and secondly because she was, when very tiny, pledged to someone else who may claim her any day; but now that we are rich (and money makes power) I am going to see what can be done about it. You'll love her. She is such a darling," he ended with a fatuous smile.

"Who is she?" asked Mah. "I hope she is worthy of you?" rapidly running over in her mind all the girls round about she could think of, and not getting within miles of the right one. "Do I know her?"

"I don't think you do, though you may have seen her. She is the Princess Badroulboudour."

"Wha—wha—what?" stuttered Mah in affright. "The daughter of the Mandrake? Oh dear! Oh dear!" she gulped. "Whatever will he say and do to you when he knows? He'll skin you alive!"

"Oh no, he won't. Don't get all worked up about that; I'm much more afraid of his scruples about the other man, but, by hook or crook, I must have her for my wife, and I'm going to see him this very day."

"Well, my dear son, Princess or no Princess, she could never be good enough for my boy. However, I shall love her for your sake of course. May the Gods protect you and send you good fortune."

"They will, if I have your blessing," replied Al.

"You have that with all my heart and soul," observed Mah.

She was a good sort, wasn't she?

CHAPTER V

Baboun bungles it

THEN Aladdin, having gorgeously apparelled himself, like a Mandarin of the highest class, in one out of the enormous number of magnificent suits in charge of his Master of the Wardrobe, called for one of his golden chariots, drawn by six cream-coloured horses from the stables, and gave orders to be driven, escorted by a numerous and glittering retinue, to the Mandrake's Pagoda, which, compared with Al's Palace, looked like a suburban jerry-built villa furnished on the hire-purchase system. Arrived there, he requested an audience, which, when the splendour of the visitor and his entourage was observed, was quickly accorded.

Our Hero, escorted into the Presence, bowed low to the Mandrake.

"Who art thou, Most Honourable Stranger, who comes to visit this miserable and unworthy Personage," enquired the latter in the self-depreciatory manner in vogue among equals with the Chinese, and which he thought proper to employ on such an occasion; though being by nature a cheery soul, he often found it difficult to keep up.

"Oh Mighty Sing-lo, Mandrake of T'sing-T'song," replied Aladdin playing up to him, "this insufficient worm now before thee, is the Prince Al-ad-Dheen from Jong in the remoter regions thousands of miles beyond the Purple Mountains, which no man may pass without his permission." (This last bit being, of course, pure swank.) "But," changing abruptly into the first person singular, "I'm putting up in my little shack here in T'sing-T'song for a change of air and

rest from Court activities, and I come to solicit a boon from your Superfluous Majesty." I think he must have intended to say "superb" or "supreme", don't you?

"Consider it granted, oh thou of much magnificence," replied the Mandrake politely, "even unto the half of my kingdom," adding to himself, "the half which doesn't pay its taxes."

"I desire no territory, Most Honourable Sing-lo, I seek something far surpassing in worth even thy wide possessions."

"Whatever can it be?" asked the other, "an oil concession or something?"

"Nay; no concession of that nature, oh, Mandrake."

"What is it then? Come along. Give it a name."

"I crave the hand of your only daughter, Tweet-Tweet. . . ."

"Tweet-Tweet?" broke in the Mandrake, "I've no child called that."

"What an idiot I am," thought Al, and aloud he answered, "I should have said, the hand of the Princess Badroulboudour."

"Dear, dear! How unfortunate! It can't be done. She was betrothed to his Tartaric Princeship when she was still in rompers. Awfully sorry, and all that, but you see how it is."

"And who's this Tartaric fellow when he's at home, I should like to know?" asked Al with some heat, dropping all pretence to carefully chosen phraseology. "A chap who does not even trouble to come and see his bride or to call on her father, all these years!"

"I don't think much of him myself," said the Mandrake, "but if I said so, he mightn't like it; and if I put a spoke in his wheel about my little girl, there's no knowing how he'd take it. And there's the risk of his sending an army against me, and he's no small potatoes—he's got more troops and money than I have, worse luck."

"Forget him, sir, or leave me to deal with him. For look at me; I can put down a hundred gold pieces against his one any day, and then have some over. As for troops, why I have an army of twenty million" (swank again) "and can make rings round any piffling little bunch of toughs he can put in the field!"

"That's all very well. Midas may be your middle name, but right's right. I have given my word, and that's all there is to it."

"Now listen to me; you're slipping up badly. I'm tons more powerful than Tartarchops and do you know why? It is by reason of the supernatural gifts wherewith I'm endowed."

"You possess sup—what you said—gifts?"

"I do."

"Well then; give me a sample," said the Mandrake. "I'm feeling rather cheap this morning—liver, I expect; only wait a moment while I call Baboun, my own Court Magician. He might learn something from your methods. He's not bad in his way though clumsy and having his limits. Indeed he has been getting a bit above himself lately; after twice spoiling two hats with trying to make an omelette in 'em with real eggs and making a mess of it, he pulled it off all right last full moon; and has been as proud ever since as a hen with a new tail."

Then, at a sign from him someone struck a gong making a rolling booming sound; and through side-curtains came a dozen black slaves escorting a weird personage in a long black gown embroidered with silvery signs and talismans, and a high conical hat similarly adorned—which nearly tipped off his head as he, miscalculating the heighth of the doorway, entered through it. Settling his head-gear with one hand and with the other striking on the floor with his staff, and rolling his eyes, he cried in an important manner almost as if he bossed the whole show:

Baboun Bungles It

"Who calls Baboun?"

Aladdin thought him more than a bit above himself, and wanting in manners to the Mandrake, and snapped aggressively:

"Who is this gentleman in the dressing-gown and clown's hat walking in without knocking?"

"Hush!" said the Mandrake (looking, for all he had said about his tame mystery-man, a wee bit shocked at Aladdin's disrespect to the big noise of his retinue).

Now, although Al did not know it, and you'd never have guessed if I hadn't told you, this chap, Baboun, had been a pal of Abanazar's; in fact they had years before been in partnership, at one time travelling the country together and doing side-shows at fairs; but had quarrelled over division of profits, and after that each had gone on his own.

Baboun was annoyed at Aladdin's flippant allusion to himself and eyed him unpleasantly, as he answered for himself:

"Oh Stranger, I am the Master of Divination and Enchantment, the greatest ever was, working spells more powerful than. . . ."

"Cut that out!" interrupted Al. "I've heard that talk before, elsewhere, and know it by heart. His Celestial Majesty's representative here—and"—pointing an accusing finger—"let me remind you you haven't kow-towed or said 'Good morning, sir' to him since you came in (bad, Babby—very bad) wishes you to be present while I perform one of my miracles."

"Are you a sorcerer too?" asked Baboun, somewhat uncomfortably, for as a matter of fact a little elementary sleight-of-hand was the extent of his abilities, though pretending he knew much more.

"Am I a sorcerer," said Al ironically. "Have you never heard of me? Don't you know anything except meal-times? I am the Prince Al-ad-Dheen, and what I don't know about magic isn't worth knowing."

" Well, well," said the Mandrake, " don't let us spend the morning arguing. Let's see you do something."

Al, bowing deferentially, solicited permission to retire into another room in order, as he explained, to concentrate his mind on the Infinite preparatory to doing his stuff; this request granted, and when quite alone, he summoned the Djinn.

" Soupy, give us a hand, will you? You know the boss of this outfit? Well I want to impress him, and Baboun his Court Magician as well; so when I go back to them, and you hear me call out ' Bags I ', I want you to whisk every rag off the Mandrake and show him in his bath-robe before the whole Court. But arrange so that his daughter isn't among those present. She mightn't like it. See? "

" I hear; and I'll obey in due season."

" Then when I cry ' Onagen! ' give him back his clothes. See? "

" I hear. It shall be so."

Now behold the whole Court, some fifty or a hundred of them, gathered in the Great Council Chamber all agog to see what was going to happen. When all was ready Al said to the Mandrake:

" It is at your distinct request that I give an exhibition of my powers? "

" Certainly," replied the Mandrake.

" And you'll be satisfied with what I do? I mean, that there's no deception and nothing up my sleeve? "

" Yes, yes, yes," said the other, " get on."

" Then," said Aladdin looking round to see for himself that Tweet-Tweet was not present, " first ask the ladies of the Court to withdraw, for the exercise of my terrible powers might appal the feminine mind."

The Mandrake, rather surprised, and also impressed, gave orders as required and then Al, pointing at him, cried in a loud voice:

" Bags I ! " and as he spoke (the Djinn having a somewhat vague idea of what a bath-robe was) the Mandrake was seen to have nothing on but a one-piece bathing suit, and a very small piece at that, looking utterly bewildered and making frantic attempts to pull up the carpet (only it was nailed down) to wrap himself in.

" Dash it ! " he cried, " this is going too far ! For goodness' sake give me back my togs ! It's too chilly for this sort of thing ! "

" But, oh Honourable Sing Lo," said Al, " you have such a fine figure" (oh, Al ! what humbug ! he was short and dumpy), " it seems a shame to hide it. Still, are you satisfied that I have the powers I claimed ? "

" I'm satisfied you'd nothing up your sleeve. I'm still more satisfied I've no sleeve to put anything up. So, I pray you, remove your spell, there's a good chap."

" If you insist ; but if Mr. Baboun Esquire is as clever as he pretends to be, why not let him do it ? "

" Well yes, that's fair enough. Baboun ! here ! Wish my robes back on me ! Come on ! Hurry up ! " (with a sneeze), " I'm getting frozen ! "

Baboun, completely taken aback—being only a third-rate illusionist—murmured something about " not being in form that day " and having a " touch of lumbago " ; but the Mandrake would listen to no excuses and insisted ; so this near-magician had to make the best of a bad job and to try to save his face, though knowing full well he had little hope of success. With whirling arms he made cabalistic passes while pirouetting rapidly round the shivering Mandrake until his royal master complained that all he was doing was to make a nasty draught, and told him in terse language, to stop jazzing about and try something else. So Baboun moved a little further off, muttering more incantations and waving his arms in the air ; but still with no result, except that he perspired freely with exertion and apprehension as to the

outcome, until some of the younger courtiers began to titter, and Al, urgently appealed to by the Mandrake, agreed to put matters right.

" Sit down, Booby, or whatever your name is, and rest," he said. " I can see you're all of a doodah. You mean well, but you're a bit out of date. Perhaps you're new to this business. You go to your room and lie down, and have a nice hot cup of tea." Then, addressing the open-mouthed courtiers added,

" All of you watch me ! " and in a loud voice he cried " Onagen ! " and the Mandrake was once more fully clothed as originally ; Baboun, looking as if he had lost a shilling and found tuppence, blindly groping his way out of the hall surrounded by his inky-coloured retinue.

" You see ? " whispered Al to the Mandrake. " That's nothing to what I can do. So now, what about your daughter ? "

" Well, er . . . er . . . er, no, dash it ! Don't bring that up again ! You mustn't think me disobliging, but I can't do it. I really can't. She's pledged herself already."

" How could she pledge herself when only a few years old ? It's ridiculous ! "

" Well, I promised for her. It's ' Noblesse oblige,' you know."

" I *don't* know," said Al, thoroughly annoyed, " but what I do know, and submit with the greatest possible respect, is that it would be difficult to meet with such another chuckle-headed sap as you. Never in all my puff have I come across such dud intelligence ! Blind to your own interests, you are. And inconsiderate of your daughter. Let *that* soak in. And " (quoting the Djinn) " lemmetellyasuthin, if the Gassergene comes fizzling about anywhere near here, what won't I do to that poor misguided fish ! " and he thumped his fist on an adjacent table, thoroughly disgruntled.

" That's O.K. by me," said the Mandrake pacifically ;

"I'm sorry we don't see eye to eye about my little girl, for I admire you for speaking your mind. I do it too. And I'd very much like to have someone so marvellously clever and so rich as yourself, for a son-in-law. We've been wanting some spare cash in this family for years. If you can get hold of this Tartaric fellow and break him in half and throw away the pieces, I shan't go into mourning; and you shall marry my daughter, with my blessing all complete, immediately after he's been swept up and removed by the Dustmen."

"It's a bet?" queried Al, somewhat mollified.

"It's a bet," said the Mandrake with a friendly nod.

"No objection meanwhile to my seeing Twee—Princess Badroulboudour, I suppose?"

"Not at all; I shall return your visit in due form and bring her with me, and after that you just drop in on us whenever you like. There'll always be a knife and fork laid for you."

"Thanks," said Al. "Same here. I shall be delighted to entertain you and er . . . er . . . your family at any time you care to drop in for pot-luck. I kiss your hand—no not that one, it's got dust on it, the other, please—and look forward to our next meeting."

"Me too," replied the Mandrake.

CHAPTER VI

Pressure on The Gassergene

ABOUT a week after that, the Mandrake and Tweet-Tweet went to Aladdin's Palace in state, and were most lavishly entertained; their host, in addition to the long pigtail he wore depending from the back of his head, donning, to disguise himself from Tweet-Tweet, two shorter ones fixed on his upper lip with spirit-gum; explaining to the Mandrake that he sometimes grew a moustache to keep the tip of his nose warm. So Tweet-Tweet, casually regarding him, did not recognise him in the least, but treated him with distant civility, if anything rather on the chilly side; and it was as much as Aladdin could do not to disclose himself then and there and give her a good hug; so adorable did she look.

When her father the next day told her that her host had asked for her hand in marriage, she, knowing she was already promised to the Gassergene, thought the Chinese for "Oh well; let 'em all come. They're all non-starters, and this young Prince seems at least kindly-natured and an improvement on some of the smart set about the Court. There's no reason why I shouldn't be polite to him!"

While she was thus musing, Aladdin rang up the Djinn who promptly appeared, saying:

"Yes, master?"

"Where's my old patched suit?"

"Here it is, Lord."

"Thank you. That's all for the present. See you later."

Then changing into his well-worn clothes, removing his

moustachios, and waiting until the coast was clear, he popped out of the private door of his Palace and hieing to Sing Lo's garden wall, climbed up. And sure enough, there was Tweet-Tweet wandering about the paths. After a cautious look round, and attracting her attention, he scrambled down and took her in his arms, murmuring endearments in her ear, and then began :

"Have you seen the new arrival in these parts ? A silly, sap-headed sort of bloke who called on your old man and asked if he might marry you ? "

" Why, however did you know ? " said she amazed at his knowledge of the latter fact which she thought unknown outside her immediate circle.

" How did you like him ? You saw him yesterday, didn't you ? " asked Al.

" I didn't take much notice of him, but I thought the best thing about him was that his voice reminded me of you and his name sounds a little like yours too."

" Well, take a good look at him and tell me what you think of him," said Al, chuckling to himself.

That evening, complete with rat-tail moustachios, he dropped in on the Mandrake after dinner, and after the usual exchange of courtesies and seeing Tweet-Tweet in the moonlit garden, made an excuse to join her.

" Salaams ! your Highness," said he ceremoniously as she curtsied low to him ; adding with a sly look, " And how's Tweet-Tweet this evening ? "

"Tut-tut-tut-tweee . . . ? What *do* you mean ? " she said, her heart nearly ceasing to beat at hearing that name from almost an utter stranger.

" This," he said, tugging at his moustache. " Owk ! " he squawked, as one side, more firmly adhesive than the other, pulled away a bit of the skin on his upper lip.

She gave one look, went white as a sheet, and trembling at the knees fell almost fainting into his arms. But a shock of

pleasant surprise doesn't do much harm or last long, and she soon recovered as he showered kisses on her brow, face and lips. What a long explanation he had to give! interrupted every now and again by her squeaks of laughter, horror or delight, as the story unfolded, under her strict promise not to pass it on to her father. At the end of it she observed:

"Shush-shush, sun of my life, this is all very well; but however rich and powerful you are, father will not break his word to the Gassergene. So we are no nearer each other than before."

"Put your dear little head on my shoulder and forget all about Chopped Suet," said her adoring lover. "Leave all that to me. I've thought of something, and if it comes off I think he'll be ready to release you."

"Oh, you clever boy! Do you really think he will? What is this scheme of yours?"

"Ah! that's a secret; yes, even from you; but I'm going to have a try, and if I don't succeed I shall begin to think I've lost my grip and am unworthy of you. No," he said as she began to pursue the subject further, "I won't tell you what it is. Trust me in all things, kiss me and wish me luck." And with that she had to be content.

Next morning he did another spot of ring-rubbing.

"Soupy," he said when the Djinn arrived, "I want you to hike over with me to call on the Gassergene this very afternoon. Yes, just a little trip of about a thousand miles. I want to catch him on the hop, as it were, without letting him know I'm coming. Can do?"

"Can do. On my head be it."

"Right ho! Call for me at half-past two. I'll be waiting for you."

The Djinn was punctual to the minute, and requesting Al to accompany him to the roof of the Palace, he unrolled and spread out a piece of matting, and sitting down on it motioned Al to his side. As soon as the latter had complied,

the matting sprang high into the air, so suddenly that for a moment, unaccustomed to using rapidly ascending lifts, the young man thought he had left his inside behind him, or would fall off; but the sensation passed, and in less time than it takes me to write it, he found himself, via a sky-light in the Gassergene's attic, outside the door of the very room in which the Djinn indicated that Prince Chop Suey was at that moment to be found. Al, without knocking, opened the door and entered immediately.

The Gassergene was sitting on a Chesterfield with his arm round the waist of a very pretty girl, their heads very close together. Seeing Al enter, he got up so suddenly that she slid down on to the floor; both goggling at him in surprise.

The intruder politely helped up the lady and handed her to the Gassergene, with the remark, "I think you've dropped something."

"Who are you? and how did you get in here?"

"I am the Prince Al-ad-Dheen of T'Sing-T'Song and I bear a message for you. I got in quite easily. There was no one to stop me, so here I am."

"Where on earth were my Black Guards?" grumbled the Gassergene peevishly.

"I don't know where the blackguards were and it doesn't matter anyhow. Do you wish to hear the words I am bidden to say to you, or don't you?"

"From whom do you bring a message?"

"From the Mandrake of T'Sing-T'Song."

"Never heard of him."

"Oh nonsense! of course you have! He is Sing-lo, the Viceroy of Weihoo and the father of Princess Badroulboudour to whom you were betrothed in childhood."

"Bless my soul!" said the Gassergene, looking the reverse of joyful, "I clean forgot all about that. What a nuisance! I wish people would not go fixing up these things when one is still in the bread-and-milk stage."

Here, the lady, whose name, so far as I have been able to ascertain, was Ickle-Sing-Zen, burst into tears, wailing, "You never told me a word of this."

"No, my precious; I did not. It had entirely slipped my memory. It was so long ago. You see," he went on, turning to Al, "this lady is, or was, to be my future wife. And here's a pretty kettle of fish! Oh! bother! bother! bother! Well; what's your message?"

"Merely one of greeting to you, oh omnipotent Chop, and a reminder that the wedding to the Princess is due to take place shortly."

"Oh no! Oh no!" wailed Ickle-Sing-Zen. "Oh, Gassy! say it's not true! Oh I shall die if you leave me for her!"

Aladdin broke in, addressing her;

"I am truly sorry for you. More sorry than I know how to say. But you see how awkward it is; because unfortunately, the Princess is not likely to be attractive to anyone else."

"Why not?" asked the prospective bridegroom.

"Because of her squint," said Al with a sigh.

"What?"

"And her hump."

"Hump?" moaned the Gassergene.

"And," said Al with another sigh and a compassionate air, "having only one leg." ("The Gods forgive me for speaking so of my Pearl of Girls," he added to himself.)

"Only wu—wu—one—le—le—leg?" gurgled the Gassergene.

"And some sort of complaint of the scalp which has gone bald in places."

"Shingle my pigtail!" shrieked the Gassergene. "Do you mean to tell me the Mandrake has the cheek to hold me to my pledge to marry such an object? It's most unfair! Why, she's not all there! She's a leg short and apparently more or less unthatched!"

"Would you like to see a recent portrait of her?" said Al fishing out a cutting from the T'Sing-T'Song *Morning Echo* with a blurry picture of one of the female freaks in a circus which not long before had pitched for a couple of nights near the city.

The Gassergene gave one look at it, and rushing to the window, opened it and put his head out, gasping for air. "I regret very much to be the bearer of unpleasant tidings, but of course," said Al turning to the lady, "there *is* a way out if His Highness will elect to take it."

"Elect to take it!" said Ickle-Sing-Zen, with a glitter in her eye. "If it's anything humanly possible, I'll see to the election part."

"Well," said Al meditatively, "perhaps if he would sign a letter under his own hand and seal abandoning all rights. . . ."

"Gassy! Come here!" she cried. "Come here quick! Where's pen and paper? Now; you write down what this kind gentleman says."

And she directed at the k.g. a look of gratitude and a dazzling smile.

The Gassergene shook him heartily by the hand saying, "Anything to get out of this mess—what shall I say? I will write anything you like."

So, prompted by the other two, he wrote as follows:

"To All Men Greeting. These Letters under mine own Royal Hand and Seal to testify that for Good Cause Shown I Chop Suey Gassergene of Tartarica do hereby for ever abjure and renounce the Bond of Betrothal heretofore entered into between me and the Princess Badroulboudour of T'Sing-T'Song And do by these Presents now and for ever after release her from the said Bond. Of this let all Kings, Princes and Mandarins take due note."

"Shouldn't I put 'whereas' or 'hereunto' or something,

to make it look more legal ? " he asked surveying the writing with much complacency.

" No," said Ickle-Sing-Zen. " It's all right as it is. Sign and seal it. Here's the wax, and I will add my name as witness, describing myself as the affianced wife of the said Gassergene."

" Yes," said he kissing her fondly. " That ought to clinch it, my pet ! "

" And do take a memory course," she recommended ; " or you may forget you're engaged to me."

" Never, Light of my Soul, should I do that," he cooed in answer.

Then Aladdin carefully placed the Renunciation Deed in his pouch ; and, bidden a cordial farewell by the other two and given an invitation to come to their wedding (arranged then and there to take place the following week) he withdrew, rejoining the Djinn waiting patiently on the tiles, to be wafted back to his Palace.

" He's quite a decent chap after all," mused Al. " To think of the amount of perfectly good hate I've wasted on that man all these years ! Why ! it was dead easy ! But I must take care that Tweet-Tweet never knows what I said about her. After all, everything's fair in love and war, and the Gassergene chap is plainly in love with a girl of his own choice, so good luck to 'em. Besides, if he ever finds out the trick that's been played on him, he will by then be an old married man. What a good job that I went when I did and that she was there ! Well, everyone will be pleased. Me most of all. Something accomplished ; something done. A good afternoon's work."

The moment he stepped off the matting and had dismissed the Djinn, he shot off in high spirits to the Mandrake.

" All clear ! " he almost shouted.

" Eh ? "

" Look, your Majesty ! Look at this," he said, producing the Gassergene's parchment.

The Mandrake perused it with open mouth, and eyebrows raised so much they nearly collided with his pigtail ; and then handed it to Tweet-Tweet, afterwards grasping Al's hand and shaking it warmly, showering on him praises and congratulations ; genuinely glad for the sake of Aladdin, his daughter, and himself.

Tweet-Tweet ? Oh, she flung her arms round her adored one's neck, murmuring love and admiration. I won't say what she said to him, or he to her, or you might think it soppy ; but her relief and joy were delightful to see.

The Mandrake, unprepared for this demonstration of affection, couldn't help remarking that Tweet-Tweet was a quick worker, and Aladdin a good second, so then they told him that they had loved each other in secret from the first time they met—but weren't too exact about the date.

Whereúpon the Mandrake beamed on them with " Bless you, my children," and all was jake.

" Tweet-Tweet darling," said Aladdin fondly after a while, " I've got my Palace and I've got you, so let me give you a keepsake of this happy day." And, forgetting Bung Ho's injunction to keep it, took off the ring, and, as it was two sizes too large for any of her tiny fingers, pushed it on her thumb.

Stupid of him—but then he was very much in love.

However, he still retained some degree of sense, for he added, " Never let it leave your possession on any pretext ; and lend it to me if I should want it at any time."

Tweet-Tweet kissed him again, and then the ring, and lastly her father, promising what she was asked, and then her adorer pressed for the wedding day to be fixed. " Why not next week ? " he argued. But the Mandrake pointed out the time was far too short for formal invitations to be sent out and accepted. Or for preparations on a sufficiently impressive scale ; " or," said he, " for you to grow your moustache again, for I see you've had it off."

" Yes, but that's no odds," said Aladdin, "I found it uncom-

fortable and it got mixed up with my spaghetti—I've scrapped it for good."

Eventually that day month was decided on, and the prospective bridegroom went back to his Palace, treading on air, and whistling the National Wedding March all the way back.

And married they were; with solemn rites and brilliantly colourful ceremonies and twelve bridesmaids, all of course in Chinese white; big-wigs from all parts of China and neighbouring territories attending the function and the subsequent imposing reception and gorgeous gorge. Bands playing. Flags everywhere. Chinese crackers let off in dozens at a time, and, as befitting the occasion, an orgy of the national pastime of kite-flying—there were over one thousand in the air at once; in fact the sky was kite congested.

But I need not dwell on details. These are dealt with at length and fully illustrated in the columns of the *Daily Slush* and other contemporary periodicals with inch-high headlines, bombastic or slobbery, accompanied by smudgy pictures of the bride and bridegroom (no two portraits alike—in some cases those of quite different people being made to do), and the bridesmaids being variously referred to by journalists present at the banquet (and who had been too severe on the—er—salmon mayonnaise) as "bony," "bouncing," or "bandy," instead of "bonny" as intended, and, naturally, without subsequent correction or apology, actions for libel not then having been invented for curbing the exuberance of an unbridled Press.

CHAPTER VII

Conspiracy

NOW, the hero and heroine having reaped their reward after long waiting, let us switch off to Baboun, rankling not only under a sense of failure, but also smarting under some of the cutting things his master had said to him; and generally suffering from what psychological poseurs call an "Inferiority Complex." (I know I've spelt psycho-etc. etc. right for I looked it up in the dictionary.)

It so happened that he decided about then to visit the capital of the adjoining country of Magnolia, where another humbug like himself was lecturing on "Cards, and how to Cheat without Being Found Out," and there, whom should he run up against but his quondam partner Abanazar, who was also hoping to pick up a wrinkle or two on the subject.

"May Allah lengthen thy days, oh Abanazar," said he. "Let us twain foregather."

"Peace be on thee, oh Baboun. We will share a cup together."

"I would rather have a separate one," said the other, taking him literally, "but no matter; I would have speech with thee for I am in grievous travail and seek for counsel and guidance in a dark hour."

"Been betting? Or lost a quarter-tael through a hole in your pocket?" queried Abanazar as he led the way into his lodgings.

"No; worse than that, much worse," moaned Baboun as they seated themselves cross-legged on the floor in

Abanazar's bedroom. "Verily withholden from me are the faces of the shades of my ancestors."

"Didn't know you had any," replied Abanazar. "However, cut out the flowery parts, and talk quick; I've got my own troubles just now. What's it all about?"

"It's about the Mandrake, currrse him," sighed Baboun emotionally.

"What about him?"

"Well, you see, there's a new resident in our place. He has built a Palace—and some Palace too—and is living there with his wife and mother. And don't they hit it up! Money flowing like water. Balls, banquets, and beanos. All the time making whoopee."

"Well, well, what of it?"

"I'm telling you. He comes and calls on the Mandrake, and while he was there he whisked all the clothes off of him leaving him in his birthday suit" (this we know was not exactly true), "right before everybody too. No respect whatever for the conventions."

"You don't say so," said Abanazar absently, taking but a tepid interest in what his friend was saying.

"Yes, I do; he said something to him like 'Magpie', and off went every blessed stitch. Told some cock-and-bull story that he was a magician. And he must be in the business for he ran up his Palace in one single night and . . . what did you say?"

For Abanazar, shaken to the core by a sudden terrible suspicion, had ejaculated "Ooph!"

"Tell me," said he with a choky feeling in his throat, "what sort of looking chap is this man you are telling me about?"

"Oh, he ain't much more than a slip of a boy—under twenty, I fancy."

Abanazar, with increasing consternation, in a voice trembling with excitement, asked,

Abanazar . . . had ejaculated "Ooph!"

(*See p.* 280)

"What'th hith name?"

"He calls himself the Prince Al-ad-Dheen."

Abanazar for a moment felt the room spin round him. So that was it, was it! Aladdin must somehow have escaped from the cave plus the Ring and the Lamp. Oh, dash! dash! But the other was going on:

"Then he egged on the Mandrake to tell me to put 'em back. So the boss says to me, he says—with a crowd all round watching me, mind you—'Wish my clothes back on me again.' Could I? Not a hope. Though I done what I could. And the Mandrake he says to the Prince, says he, 'You do it,' and he done it. All his things went back, snap! like that, from his hat with the little button on top down to his sock-suspenders. And my boss, next day, he sent for me, and in a nasty way told me I'd got past my job and he was going to work out my Superannuation allowance; and he give me a month's notice. And this feller what I'm telling you about married Princess Badroulboudour last Toosdy week."

Abanazar, by now somewhat recovered, though his head was still a whirl of emotion, was cogitating how best to cope with this frightfully unforeseen emergency. It was plain to him that his intended victim had found out all about the Ring of Desire and the Lamp of Miracles; and the Djinn was now working for him, thus completely turning the tables.

"Lissenme," he said to Baboun, "you and I have got to get together over this. I've myself got a bone or two to pick with that young spark. I've had it in for him for some time. Let's talk it over," and he told his companion all about the cave, the Ring and the Lamp and the Djinn and so forth.

Baboun, his eyes getting rounder and rounder during the recital, was much impressed, and in his turn mentioned about Aladdin giving the ring to Tweet-Tweet, who was openly wearing it.

Then these two old scamps conversed in low tones as to

how they could go to work to do Al in the eye. The outcome of a long confabulation was, that while Baboun was to try and get hold of the lamp on some specious excuse, say, for instance, to clean it up, or any old how, he, Abanazar, was to see what he could do to relieve Tweet-Tweet of the ring.

"And what do *I* get out of it?" asked Baboun.

"Why! you get your job back, because when we get hold of the doings you will be able to work real magic all the time."

"M'ph! But what about expenses?"

"Dash it all! you don't seem to be able to see the wood for the trees! Don't be so cheese-paring! Supposing it does cost you a few bits of money for bribes, and the like; you'll get it all back and a lot more when you get hold of the Lamp."

You observe? Abanazar did not obtrude the fact that nothing could be done with the lamp without the ring, or with the ring minus the lamp, for he was intending to double-cross Baboun and get the lamp away from him at the first opportunity.

"That's true," observed Baboun. "And what do you propose to do with the young feller when we've got the lamp and ring? Take a scimitar and spoil his symmetry for the cemetery?"

"Fill him with soapsuds, blow him into a bubble and then burst him," replied Abanazar grimly.

"And very nice too," said Baboun. "I should never have thought of that myself. I should like to be there when you do it. I can always do with a good laugh. And what about his Palace?"

"Oh that!" replied Abanazar. "I shall tear it up by the roots and dump it down in the middle of Africa."

"Why Africa?" queried Baboun.

"Why not?" answered Abanazar.

"Well, that suits me all right," replied the other, "for if you don't mind I'll tell old She-duck" (meaning the Man-

drake), " that I done it myself, with my superior enchantments. That'll make him sit up and take notice ! "

" Tell him anything you like," said Abanazar.

" A pretty fool he'll look," mused Baboun with a grin, " and he'll look a bigger fool when I hint that if he doesn't watch his step I'll shift his Pagoda and him too. That'll show him who I am. Me to be sacked ! Me to be superannuated ! Me what's been there twenty years and served him faithful ! Sing-lo indeed ! I'll make him sing low, so low, a chicken just out of the shell will shout in comparison ! "

" I don't know about your fidelity," commented Abanazar, " but if you've been there twenty years, you must have had some tidy pickings."

" Not done so badly," replied Baboun with a smug leer, " but I'll have a lot more out of 'em before I'm done. I'll squeeze 'em, when I've got back my presto prestige ; you mark my word ! "

Tweet-Tweet and Aladdin were now both settled in the latter's Palace. Knowing this, Baboun concentrated on altering his appearance in various ways, such as putting on a shade cleaner neck-tie ; washing his hands and face and back of his neck ; and having his hair cut and wearing specs with dark blue glasses. His idea was to hang round the Palace on the chance of finding, and then purloining, the lamp ; so with a stump of pencil behind his ear and a notebook in hand he infested the place morning noon and night, pretending to be a reporter for the Court Column of the *Weihoo Tittle-Tattle*, hoping for an opportunity to find out where the thing was kept.

Day by day went on, and the grand wedding was a function of weeks past, and yet he seemed no nearer his goal. As he said to Abanazar in one of their conferences, " the place was always crawling with Flunkeys, slaves and hangers-on of all sorts, who seemed to eye him with suspicion." I don't think they did really, although Aladdin's head coachman did say

it seemed to him as if he could never move a yard without stubbing his toe on "Nosey-Parker" (meaning Baboun). No; I fancy it was just "conscience which makes cowards of us all" which caused him to think people were taking more interest in him than they did. So wherever the Lamp of Miracles was, there it remained; apparently as secure and ungetatable as if it were in a Safe Deposit, or back in the cave again.

And Abanazar, although full of schemes for wangling the ring from Tweet-Tweet, was making no progress either, and yet was always nagging his companion to "get a move on."

A situation most disturbing for this precious pair of rascals. And exasperating.

CHAPTER VIII

Sing-Lo's S O S

I SEE I haven't lately mentioned Mah, trying hard to accustom herself to so complete a change of her surroundings, and mode of living. You'd think she'd be going singing about the house as happy as the day was long, wouldn't you?

But she wasn't. Not altogether.

The fact was, having always been an energetic little body, she found the contrast rather trying, and her life somewhat empty. For a time, perhaps, preparations for the wedding had pleasantly occupied her, but now it was over, she felt at a loose end, and though she wouldn't have admitted it to the happy pair, she got a little tired of being odd-man—or perhaps I should say odd-woman—out; and longed for a good old turn of the mangle, or a morning occupied in slamming down flat-irons. Washing-day at the Palace was a real joy to her, for then she pervaded the up-to-date laundry and hustled the work-girls right and left; but even then she was not too much at ease, for, as she confided to her daughter-in-law, "she did not understand them new-fangled labour-saving gadgets" and didn't think they could possibly do the work as well as by hand in the way to which she had been used.

She said as much to Al, adding:

"This posh style of livin' is all very well, but seems to me the days are awful long, and the mornin's fair give me the 'ump."

"Why?" asked her son.

" Well, look at what I got to go through. First a lot of 'ussies insist on putting on me cloes for me when I could very well do it meself, and then most days I 'ave to 'ave my 'air permed, and me dial dolled up, or else another lot takes off me slippers and stockings and 'as a go at me chilblains, givin' me gyp. Meanin' well, but I 'ates that part. And all I got to do is 'elp Tweet-Tweet to fix the meandyou—what they calls the bill of fare—and after that it's eat or bloomin' well sleep till dinner-time, and then eat some more, 'cos you're out with her most afternoons. An' I gets nasty looks if I 'elp with washin' up."

" I'm sorry, mother. I thought all this would be so nice and restful for you."

" Oh, I ain't grumblin', dear, I wouldn't be so ungrateful. I loves it in a way but it's dull, that's what it is, since your wedding was over and done with."

" I'm afraid I can't marry Tweet-Tweet all over again, even to please you, mother," commented Al with a smile but feeling a little bit disheartened. " Let's hope you'll get used to it in time."

However, the situation changed for Mah very soon after that, and this is how it came about.

The Mandrake, having great faith in his son-in-law's abilities and judgment, got into the way of consulting him about all sorts of things and often popped into the Palace, or sent a message asking him to " come round and give him five minutes ".

Al, having had one of such messages one morning, went to the Pagoda ; when in the entrance hall he heard a " Psst ", and saw the Mandrake with his nose and one eye swivelling round the edge of his study door. Having thus attracted attention, he put his finger to his lip in a meaning way and beckoned.

" What is it this time ? " asked Aladdin when they had entered the room and the Mandrake had shut the door very

quietly after stealthily peering out; Al surveying this performance with some curiosity, wondering what was up.

Then his father-in-law tip-toed over to him whispering, "Hush!"

"I *am* hushing," replied Al. "But why?"

"Little trouble with the cook," breathed the Mandrake, with a chastened air, "have you seen a fierce-looking female with a red face and inflamed eyelids hanging about with a whacking big carving fork in her hand?"

"No," said Al, "nothing like that."

"That's all right then," said his father-in-law wiping his brow. "Listen, I want you to do me a favour if you will."

"Certainly," said Al. "Anything to oblige provided it's possible."

"Oh quite possible. To you, child's play I should think. It's this way. Cook's been with me a good many years and she presumes on the fact. She knows quite well what I like and don't like and whether I prefer it under-done or t'other thing; but I'm 'fraid she's got careless. Twice lately she has burnt my toast; and I strongly suspect she helps herself to my best Orange Pekoe. Last night I found a burnt match in my bird's-nest soup. So I ticked her off, and she flared up and said she put it in on purpose to make it look a bit more natural—like they put a bee's wing in the honey-pot—and I began to tell her there's no nesting material in bird's-nest soup, and got as far as 'My good woman,' when she says, says she, 'I ain't your good woman.' And I says, 'Well, bad woman then,' and very solemnly I asks, 'do you know my son-in-law could turn you into a beetle if he chose!' and she says, says she, with a toss of her head, 'Pleasant change, a rest for me; slaving as I do. Let him get on with it,' and after that she burst into tears and howled a month's notice at me; and just now, waving the carving fork as if she was going to stick me with it, she enquired in a meaning way 'had I

any more complaints.' Very disturbing; and cooks are so difficult to get."

"I don't see what all this has to do with me," said Al.

"Oh yes, but it has; for this is where I want your help. If you can do what you did to me in the hall some time ago. . . ."

"Oh, that's different," broke in Al. "I couldn't. . . ."

"No, I don't mean that; what I mean is couldn't you perform some miracle or enchantment and put her in her place? If you could turn her into a cockroach for half an hour, it would show her I could put my foot down."

"Not on her. I won't agree to that."

"No, no. You haven't grasped the idea. What I mean is, to threaten to squash her flat; only threaten, not do it, of course. And then you could change her back again, and tell her kindly but firmly that if she didn't mend her ways and stop cheeking master you would turn her into some unpleasant insect for good and all."

"Don't care about it much," said Al, thinking it might be rather beneath the Djinn's dignity to collaborate in operating on the kitchen staff, "but I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll ask Mah what she suggests."

"Oh, ah, yes. If you think it would do any good. But I rather like my plan. I don't want the woman to leave, but I will not eat cindery toast, nor chew matchwood, to please anybody. No, sir. However, if you won't do it, you won't, and I dare say you know best. I've got other worries too. There's that Junior Sub-assistant Pageboy f'rinstance, the one with the pimply face and adenoids, who sucks peppermint. I can smell him yards away. Can't you do something about that?"

"Well I can only suggest what I said just now, that Mah might tackle all this."

"Thanks, er . . . er . . . yes. I expect she could handle the situation. Yes. A most capable woman. I've

"I found a burnt match in my bird's-nest soup."

The Djinn

(See p. 287)

a very great respect for her. I wish she would undertake the management of my establishment. It wants somebody in control, and now that my daughter has gone there's no one to keep things in order."

"Well, why don't you ask her?" queried Aladdin.

"You don't think she'll mind?"

"Mind what? You asking? or she doing it?"

"Both! or either."

"I'm sure she won't; but if she does, she can say so, can't she?"

So the Mandrake, with some misgiving, trotted round to the Palace and approached Mah, addressing her courteously as he always did, and after some opening remarks about what wonderful weather they were having for the time of the year, he broached the subject.

"I'm glad to have this opportunity of a chat with you. Mine is a lonely life now that my daughter has gone."

"Yes," said Mah. "No doubt it makes a difference but all three of us like to see you at any time, you know."

"M'yes, but it's not the same thing. I want a helpmate, so to speak. Someone to darn my socks and put buttons on my shirts and so forth, and it struck me that perhaps you . . ."

"'Arf a mo'," said Mah, "is this a proposal?"

"Proposal? Well, er . . . yes, in a way."

"Nothin' doin'," replied Mah. "Much obliged; great honour and all that; but I prefer to remain faithful to my 'usband's memory," adding to herself, "and a neat way of putting it, and it's the truth too, for goodness knows whether Pah's alive or not," and then aloud, "But it's usual to say in these cases that I'll be a sister to you, and so I will, if you like."

"Thank you very much," said the Mandrake. "But what I really meant was not so much hitching up with me as keeping an eye on me and my ménage. From outside, if you take

my meaning." Here his voice trailed away in muttered and obscure reference to beetles, cooks, page-boys, and peppermint.

"Sorry," said Mah; her mind rather relieved. "I thought you meant matrimony. What you are offering me is a job of work as a daily help. That it?"

"Didn't look upon it quite like that, but I suppose that's putting it in a nutshell," said the Mandrake, "and you can name your own terms. Live in, or out, just as you like. Come and go at any time you want to. Some of my crowd seem to be getting out of hand."

"I think they miss the feminine touch," said Mah. "I'll decide now; the answer's 'Yes'—I would certainly like some occupation. What was it you said just now about the cook?"

"Oh, she's given me notice, and was rather nasty about it. She upset me very much. A violent woman. If I were not a humane man I'd have thought out some way of correcting her with red-hot tin-tacks or boiling oil. She's been a bit of a trial lately. Although I'm not sure that I want her to go; she can be human if she likes."

"I'll find out what she does want," said Mah. "I expect it's another woman's experienced management. And cooks, you know, are often bad-tempered last thing at night, and first thing in the morning. I'll settle her. As for me doing it on terms, like what you said, I was going to say I'd do it for love—but you might misunderstand, but I cert'nly won't do it for money."

"That's very kind of you," said the Mandrake.

"Not at all! Kindness is on your side to let me, and give me something to think about."

And so it was arranged; Mah dividing her time between the two establishments. And, if you want to know, she fixed up matters in five minutes with the page and the rebellious cook, and the latter either because she knew she had a soft job, or because of the way Mah put it, or perhaps because she was

just a wee bit afraid Al might after all take her in hand with inconvenient results, showed a contrite spirit and promised amendment.

The outcome was that the Mandrake said he had never been so comfortable, and so well looked after, ever since the time of his dear wife, and that Mah had a heart of gold under a mailed fist—rather mixing his metaphors, but everyone knew what he meant, Mah bridling and being particularly bucked by the compliment.

CHAPTER IX

The Bogus Ring

WHILE the episodes recounted in the last chapter have been engaging our attention, what progress had Abanazar made in pursuing his nefarious schemes? Let's look in on him, shall we?

He had been racking his brains how to get hold of the Ring, weighing up pros and cons of first one and then another wangle, but rejecting them all in turn until one day he got an idea which seemed to him full of promise. He betook himself to a jeweller, and from memory gave him minute particulars of the ring, ordering one to be made exactly like it. When, after haggling over the price and beating down the craftsman, it had been duly delivered to him, he examined it closely and felt sure it was an accurate copy.

Having ascertained from Baboun that Tweet-Tweet often walked in the beautiful Palace grounds, and without taking him into his confidence, he approached one of the gardeners and managed to bribe him to ask for a month's holiday on full pay for reasons of health, and to put him (Abanazar) forward as a cousin of his willing to act as substitute during his absence.

This was done. So far so good, and our heavyweight had a fairly strenuous time, swatting wasps raiding fruit, pushing wheelbarrows, trying to work a scythe, and sweeping up leaves from the paths, loathing it all of course, but keeping a sharp look-out for a chance to speak to Tweet-Tweet. But very often her husband or Mah was with her, or Baboun hove

in sight, and an expeditious retreat had to be effected into the nearest shrubbery (and I hope it was a prickly one).

At last, however, after a week or so of healthful but back-aching exercises, he had a stroke of luck and met her face to face alone in one of the conservatories. Salaaming respectfully, he opened up by asking her if he could pick her a bunch of grapes. After a little further conversation he remarked casually :

" You know I'm only doing this while my cousin is away, and because I'm so fond of gardening. My own trade is dealing in curios."

" Really ! " said she busy with the pips, " how interesting ! What sort of curios ? "

He replied equally casually, " Oh, trinkets, necklaces, anklets, rings and such like, you know."

" Perhaps you would like to look at this old ring ? " she remarked kindly, holding out her hand for him to inspect it.

" Yes, miss, that's a very nice piece of work," he commented wheezily, pretending to regard it admiringly, " but what a pity it's so discoloured. I can clean it for you in a minute if you like."

And Tweet-Tweet, forgetting all about Al's warning against parting with it, said, " Thanks awfully."

There was some excuse for her ; you see she was close to the house, there were other gardeners not far away working in the garden, so she felt, I suppose, a subconscious sense of security and never dreamed of any evil from this fat and genial but respectful grape-gatherer. She therefore started to pull it off her dear little thumb, where it was just a weeny bit tight, in order to hand it to him.

You will guess what he was going to do—a little sleight-of-hand, and hand her back the counterfeit.

This is one of the places where previous historians, probably through inaccurate translation, have misled you. You

think she handed the ring to Fatty, don't you? That's just where you're wrong—but I don't blame you but those who ought to have known better than misinform you.

The ring being, as I said, rather a close fit, Tweet-Tweet had to twist it round and round to get it over her knuckle; of course rubbing it a good deal in the process.

Then with a blast of hot air, just behind Abanazar, the Djinn materialised!

The little Bride had, we know, heard of him from her husband but had never seen him, and was quite unprepared for so horrifying an apparition, so with a shrill scream of "Oh Shush-Shush!" she legged it at a pace far exceeding the speed limit, into the Palace, pale with horror and scared into fits, bursting into a meeting of Officers of the Establishment presided over by her husband. There she swooned away, among the ink-bottles and blotting paper on the Council table, Aladdin's face turning the colour of chalk as he bent over her with endearments, beseeching her to tell him what ailed her.

Meanwhile the Djinn, taking in the situation at a glance, with an angry snarl sounding like "Spitzbergen" had bared his teeth in a demoniac grin and connected with the back of Abanazar's neck, giving him a hefty shove; but the latter, being so circular, merely swayed forward on his fat tummy and then swayed back again—like those ninepins you can't knock over. When he regained the perpendicular he turned and saw the Djinn.

"What do *you* want to come butting in for?" he wheezed peevishly. "Can't a gentleman speak to a la——?"

But the Djinn put a huge horny hand on his face and pushed, nearly driving Abanazar's nose through the back of his neck, and this time he swayed back on to his hinterland and then again reverted to the erect position.

Then the Djinn, still looking like a particularly bad thunderstorm, growled menacingly:

"Begone, Reptile! and tarry not!" at the same time placing his right thumb to his nose and spreading out his fingers; joining those of his other hand in front of them, and waggling the whole bunch at Abanazar.

The latter, panic-struck and tenderly feeling his flattened beak, seeing that the game was up, and more than apprehensive as to how long the Djinn would let him remain in one piece, stood not on the order of his going but went at once, shedding his left slipper in his hurry, which was accordingly left (joke; but don't laugh if you don't want to) behind him.

By this time Tweet-Tweet had recovered, and with her head on Aladdin's breast, had told him with many shattering sobs what had so terribly frightened her; so calming her with a few hurried words of comfort (and of course a kiss or two), he dashed out of the Palace, but even if he had been quicker he would not have been able to see Abanazar for dust. However, the Djinn was still there, standing outside the greenhouse looking rather pleased with himself.

"Here; come now! what's been happening? How is it you have appeared without my summoning you?"

"Lord," said the Djinn humbly, rather damped, "have I done wrong in thy sight? The ring was rubbed and I came in obedience thereto."

"I'm glad you did; but I did not rub it."

"Master; it is written in the Leaves of Wisdom that when he whom I serve taketh unto himself a wife they twain become one. It therefore matters not whether he or she summon me —I must obey."

"That never occurred to me," observed Al. "Yes, you're right. You did well. Tell me, it was Abanazar, wasn't it?"

"Yea verily, Master," then, reverting to the vernacular, "up to his blooming tricks again; artful as a wagonload of monkeys; look at this!" and he produced the bogus ring which Abanazar had dropped in his flight.

Our hero at once saw what the intended ruse had been,

and devoutly thankful that it had not succeeded, insisted this time on grasping and cordially shaking the Djinn's hand, murmuring his heartfelt gratitude. And the Djinn, overcome, turned away mumbling in a broken voice, "Don't mention it . . . I promised I'd go out of my way to help you. You are the first master . . . who has treated me . . . as one gentleman to another. I do . . . appreciate it . . . oh I do indeed!"

"And believe me, Soupy, no words of mine can testify what I feel towards you for what you have done for me—us, I should say—but you did scare my little darling by popping up like that!"

"Alas! I am in very truth sorry. Do tell her so; but, Master, I had to act quickly and DO IT NOW."

"I should think you had! And from now on, even if not summoned officially, your job is to keep an eye on her. I shall never be easy in my mind about her whilst that bloated gas-balloon is about. She won't be frightened of you the next time she sees you; on the contrary, I know very well she will want to tell you how grateful she is."

CHAPTER X

Nemesis

ABANAZAR, much shaken by this adventure, sought out Baboun, and without letting him know he had tried to get the ring and failed, urged him to get a move on as regards the lamp, extracting a promise he (Baboun) would redouble his efforts, for his companion in crime realised that although filching the lamp would not do much good, yet the ring would thereby be rendered useless to Al. He accounted in his own mind for the Djinn's inopportune appearance by the supposition that both lamp and ring had been given to Tweet-Tweet; the ingenious argument propounded to Aladdin not having presented itself to Abanazar's mind.

A day or two after Baboun had a bit of luck, or thought he had.

Our young Prince had come to the conclusion that Abanazar would certainly have another try to further his wicked designs and so, copying his methods, he got the Djinn to make an exact copy of the Lamp of Miracles; this was done, and so nearly alike was it, that even that powerful henchman had to make a secret mark on it to prevent his mistaking it for the original.

Then the copy was placed where it could be plainly seen from the garden, just within arm's length of an open window on the ground floor.

Now, the window was not one of glass, but a sizeable wooden shutter affair which pulled up and down, and Al explained to the Djinn the nature of the trap he was setting;

adding that the Djinn was to keep watch—invisible of course—and if and when Abanazar came prowling round and tried to reach the lamp, the Djinn was to pounce on him and drag him into the Palace, when it should be decided what was to be done with him.

In due course, an evening or two later, up slinks Baboun, just as it was getting dark; saw the open window, saw the room was empty, and saw what was in it; so chortling inside with joy and triumph, he poked his head into the room, and reached out for what he took to be THE lamp.

But at that moment down with a run came the heavy shutter of the window with a thud on the back of his neck, holding him tight, half stunned, and nearly guillotined.

I like this bit, don't you?

Aladdin, summoned by the Djinn, came along and after the latter had gone outside and djinngered up the captive with one or two hefty whacks on his back-end with a broom-handle (another bit I like), they raised the shutter and bound him with lots of rope, depositing him—looking rather like a cocoon—on the floor. Then Aladdin, taking another look at him, discovered it was not Abanazar at all; but Baboun.

"Gosh! It's Sing-Lo's mystery-man!" he exclaimed. "What were you up to, dash it?" he demanded of the prisoner in stern tones.

Baboun, looking like a wet Bank Holiday, glared at him but remained silent.

"Oh! you won't speak, won't you? Soupy! Kindly attend to this for me, will you?"

The Djinn promptly sat heavily on Baboun's chest and commenced to bump up and down with monotonous regularity; a process highly inconvenient to the man underneath, but not quite efficacious enough. So Bung Ho accentuated it, introducing a pleasing (?) variation by grasping a handful of the victim's hair and beating a tattoo with his head on the parquet flooring, until Baboun, thoroughly cowed,

blurted out an agonised confession, putting all the blame on Abanazar, and tearfully whimpering that the latter had importuned him ever so many times to steal the lamp, but he (Baboun) was all along very much averse to doing so, and all he had intended to do when detected, was just to look at it—not take it away, oh dear no!

"I don't believe a word about his being unwilling to pinch it, and all that," commented Al to the Djinn. However, we'll have Abby-babby here, so find him, Soupy, will you, and give him a cordial invite to the party."

"So be it!" was the reply with a wide smile.

Thus it was that Abanazar, nursing his inflamed proboscis and a painful blister on his left foot, to his horror suddenly found himself grabbed by the slack of his breeches by an invisible hand, carried swiftly through the air and banged down on his knees before Aladdin.

And what did the latter not say to him! He gave him a thorough ticking-off.

At the conclusion of his acidulated observations,

"Now, Baboun," said Aladdin—to the surprise and consternation of Abanazar who didn't know his colleague was there, having taken him for a roll of matting, "repeat what you were saying just now." And Baboun spoke his piece all over again, and still trying to do himself a bit of good at Abanazar's expense, added,

"Yes—and he said he'd blow Prince Al-ad-dheen into a bubble with soap-suds and burst him!"

"Liar!" shouted Abanazar. "I never!"

"Yes, you did!"

"I didn't! I wouldn't think of doing any thuch thing. Anyway, you thaid you wanted to be there when I did it, becauthe you liked a good laugh!"

"So you *did* think out the soap-suds stunt, did you!" said Aladdin. "Oh, naughty naughty Abby. But how silly of you to give yourself away like that! Well now, we must

see what can be done about it. Soupy! there's a spare piece of rope about the right size just behind you. Thanks. Now, big boy," he went on, turning to Abanazar and resuming his remarks. "You shall have a little invigorating exercise. Good for the figure. And Baboun shan't be done out of his ray of sunshine either. Laugh and grow fat I wouldn't wonder! So skip, Abby dear!" he ended ingratiatingly.

"Thkip?" gasped Abanazar paling.

"Yeth—I mean yes, skip with this bit of rope. Twenty times right round that table. Go on! Spring to it with a glad hip-skip-hurray!"

"I won't," desperately spluttered Abanazar, "not at my time of life."

"Oh yes you will, or my servant here shall turn you inside out and make you swallow yourself, and you won't grow younger that way."

This threat was enough, so although Abanazar was by no means athletic and never had been, he started off round the big table in the middle of the room, whirling the rope as best he could with his fat arms, over his head and under his feet, gambolling clumsily, often mistiming himself, and frequently tripping up and coming a series of purlers when the mats on the polished floor slid from under him. But being so round everywhere, when he fell he merely bounced in a limp squashy sort of manner, rather like a football when it's not properly inflated.

"Faster!" called out Aladdin, "put some pep in it! Now you, Baboun; laugh! Go on! laugh!"

"Heh! Heh!" piped Baboun very pianissimo indeed.

"Louder!"

"Heh! Heh!" (with one apprehensive eye on the panting and red-eyed Abanazar).

"I didn't say bleat—I said laugh. If you weren't so tied up, I'd get you to clap your tiny hands gleefully and do a happy little dance. However, you can still open and shut

your face, so—come on, laugh! Joyously and loudly please! And keep it up."

"HEH! HEH!" gurgled Baboun (with the forte pedal pressed down a bit, obediently smiling but as if it hurt him—which it did on account of his awful headache), enraging Abanazar to such an extent that—wanting to take it out of somebody and as usual acting first and thinking afterwards—he made a vicious rush at his former associate. Whereupon the Djinn shepherded him back to the racing track with his toe (and not too gently either), and the record-breaker dejectedly started his fourteenth lap.

"I've a good mind to stand you in a corner for being cross," observed Al. "However, you shall go round ten times more, making thirty in all!"

It was an arresting sight; Abanazar bathed in perspiration wearily bounding heavily up and down and round and round while the depressed Baboun mechanically emitted sheep-like baa's at intervals.

At the twenty-third lap Al got tired of watching the contortionist, and turning to the Djinn who was thoroughly enjoying himself, commanded:

"Put both these rascals deep down below in the cavern where the Lamp was secreted, leaving them there securely bound until decision shall have been made as to their punishment. They will be able to have a nice long chat, and if they stop there for ever I bet it won't be long enough."

And this was done. Abanazar and Baboun both indulging as they disappeared in bitter and blistering recrimination. They must have had quite a lot to say to each other in the cave. What do you think?

When the Djinn returned, chuckling and rubbing his hands, Tweet-Tweet was summoned, and introduced to her supernatural protector, of whom she was not a bit apprehensive, only thinking that a visit to the dentist might effect some improvement in his appearance, and thanked him prettily

for barging in when he did; saying such nice things that the Djinn, murmuring in an embarrassed tone, "Not at all, don't mention it—any little thing I can do at any time . . ." blew his nose, while in his eyes were gathered a flood of outsize tears which he mopped up on the window curtains, muttering with a catch in his breath that he "wasn't used to such kindness and praise from a lovely lady". Then bowing low, addressing Aladdin, he said, licking his lips,

"Shall thy servant now be permitted to put it properly across those two pig-dogs?"

"By all means," replied Aladdin. "Do whatever you like. I leave it to you, partner."

. . . . .

Well, as I gather from those sinister last sentences, Abanazar and Baboun are nearing the conclusion of their activities, I may as well choose this moment to end this thrilling story.

Aladdin and his dearly beloved Tweet-Tweet, as all nice people should do, and as every fairy story should end, lived happily ever after.

In due course he succeeded the Mandrake on the throne, and became the most powerful Prince for hundreds and hundreds of miles around, esteemed and respected by everyone.

Mah, doting on Tweet-Tweet, in addition to keeping the Mandrake's ménage up to the mark, appointed herself Chief Lady of the Palace Larder, taking both positions very seriously and no longer complaining of inaction, every hour of the day being fully occupied in bossing the staffs respectively, and repressing waste or prodigality; to such an extent that the Mandrake sometimes wished he could have five minutes alone with whoever invented hash.

For a long time she lived happy in the affection of Al and her daughter-in-law, until at last she died, full of years and honour.

The Djinn was accommodated at his own request in an empty barrel in the back-yard—to save him going backwards and forwards to his Amphora ; and besides it was more roomy —and, devoted to Aladdin and his wife, continued to watch over them, and Tweet-Tweet's first act every morning was to summon him, a call which he gladly obeyed. And what a blessing he was to them ! If Aladdin mislaid a State paper, or she her embroidery silks, all they had to do was to ask their smiling servant to find them, and he brought them instanter, never so happy as when making himself generally useful and pleasing them.

Don't you wish you had a Djinn of your own ? I wish I had, I could use him quite a lot.

. . . . .

You will perhaps want to know what happened in the end to him, and to Aladdin and his wife, lovers to the end. If so, I must strike a graver note.

After very many years of unexampled mutual affection, Tweet-Tweet, by then a frail little old lady, but in her husband's eyes as delicately lovely as a bit of their native porcelain, went to her Long Rest. Aladdin, himself of great age, unable to bear the loss of his sweet consort, felt the blow so keenly that he knew he too had not long to live.

Shortly before he was Gathered to his Fathers, he summoned the Djinn, enjoining him earnestly to see that the Lamp and Ring should never thereafter fall into evil hands, and a few days later followed Tweet-Tweet into the Land of Shadows.

The Djinn, heartbroken at thus being bereft of the two humans whom he had so long and faithfully served, and meditating on Al's last request, decided he could only comply by an act of complete self-sacrifice. Gently drawing the Ring from Al's finger, he bore it and the Lamp to the cavern, where he buried them in separate excavations deep down below the ground, piling huge rocks over them, and causing a tre-

mendous earthquake completely to block throughout its length the entrance by which he had come, and through which Aladdin had penetrated so many years before.

And there the lamp and ring remain to this day, and no man may tell where they may be found, for all knowledge of even the locality where they lie buried has long since been lost.

Having done this, the Djinn prostrated himself on the spot where he had first seen Aladdin, and with tears raining down his cheeks, in a loud voice full of emotion, cried :

"Dear Lord and Master, thy final command hath been obeyed ; henceforth it is beyond the power of any born of earth to summon me, the Slave of the Ring and Lamp, from my solitude. Nor would I wish it otherwise. Better far so to remain ; unbidden to a world of bitter sorrows and transient joys. Therefore do I go to my prison for all eternity, looking for no release, but secure in comforting memories of the brief space of time during which I performed my willing duty to those who repaid me a thousandfold with kindness and love. Once more, oh thrice blessed Master, farewell !"

Then there was a vivid flash, as in the twinkling of an eye, with bowed head and downcast mien, he passed thence with no mortal eye to observe the manner of his going nor his ultimate destination.

But it is to be supposed that he retired to his Amphora in the Sea of Eblis, never for all time to emerge.

. . . . .

And thus are the characters on this historic stage disposed of, and we can ring down the curtain, and turn out the lights, for the play is over and the actors have left the theatre, to return only when you re-open the foregoing pages.

. . . . .

I beg your pardon ; what did you say ? Oh ! that I've forgotten about Baboun and Abanazar and what the Djinn did with them ? So I have ! I apologise.

Nemesis

Well, next time you go to Regent's Park and visit the Zoo, stroll down the path past the aviaries where they keep the vultures and carrion-crows and you may observe a forlorn looking bird, with only a few tail-feathers and those bedraggled, rather bald about the head and neck, and altogether a mangy-looking fowl, hunched dejectedly on its perch, from time to time uttering discordant shrieks. Have a good look at it as it unfurls and stretches each wing alternately, now and then savagely stropping its beak, a picture of utter boredom, misery and despair.

What am I driving at? I'll tell you.

That solitary piece of wreckage is Abanazar with different outsides.

Then go on to the monkey-house, and, in Summer outside, and in Winter just inside, the door, you will see in a strongly wired cage a morose and sulky-looking ape-like mammal, whose red and blue old school tie has twisted right round and slipped well down his back. The label on the cage bears, I think (though it may have been altered lately), the words "Mandrill Vulgus", and a very vulgus—I mean vulgar—appearance he presents. Make a face at him if you like, or, better still, prod him with a long stick with a pin in the end, but don't on any account give him a bun, or a banana; he doesn't deserve 'em.

For why?

That's Baboun, that is.

THE END